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ABSTRACT

This collection contains 17 papers presented at a seminar on literacy strategies in the community movement, held in Namur, Belgium, in 1991. The following papers are included: "Introduction" (Hautecoeur); "Illiteracy: Direction? Action? Results?" (Hautecoeur); "Basic Education and Personal Development Strategies" (Georis); "Breaking Down Barriers: A Local Approach to Adult Basic Education" (Denwette, Walker, Tett); "Illiteracy--Solely an Educational Problem?" (Jaehn); "Knowing Where We Are: Participatory Research and Adult Literacy" (Hamilton, Ivanic, Barton); "Community Development Project among the Gypsies of Sao Gregorio" (Oliveira et al.); "Literacy and Community Development in a Lower Class Neighborhood" (Dias); "Building a Regional Partnership in the Fight against Illiteracy in Belgium" (Chapotte, David); "Urgently Required: Imagination--A Writing Competition" (Azzimonti); "Working with Illiterate Young People in a Community Group: The Boite a Lettres Experience (1983-1987)" (Roy); "From Specialized Training to Grass-Roots Literacy Education" (Raymond, Meunier); "Women and Literacy: A Vital Movement" (de Coster); "The Alpha Mons-Borinage Experience" (Arrijs); "Adult Education: Literacy for the Masses" (Corzo, Lancho); "Training: A Tool in the Struggle against All Types of Exclusion?--The History of AFER (Action-Formation-Etude-Recherche)" (Gosset, Caron, Andreau); "Basic Education in Flanders: Strengths and Weaknesses" (Gehre); and "Literacy Tactics in the Community Organizations Movement" (Hautecoeur). (MN)

ALPHA 92

Current Research in Literacy

Edited by Jean-Paul Hautecoeur

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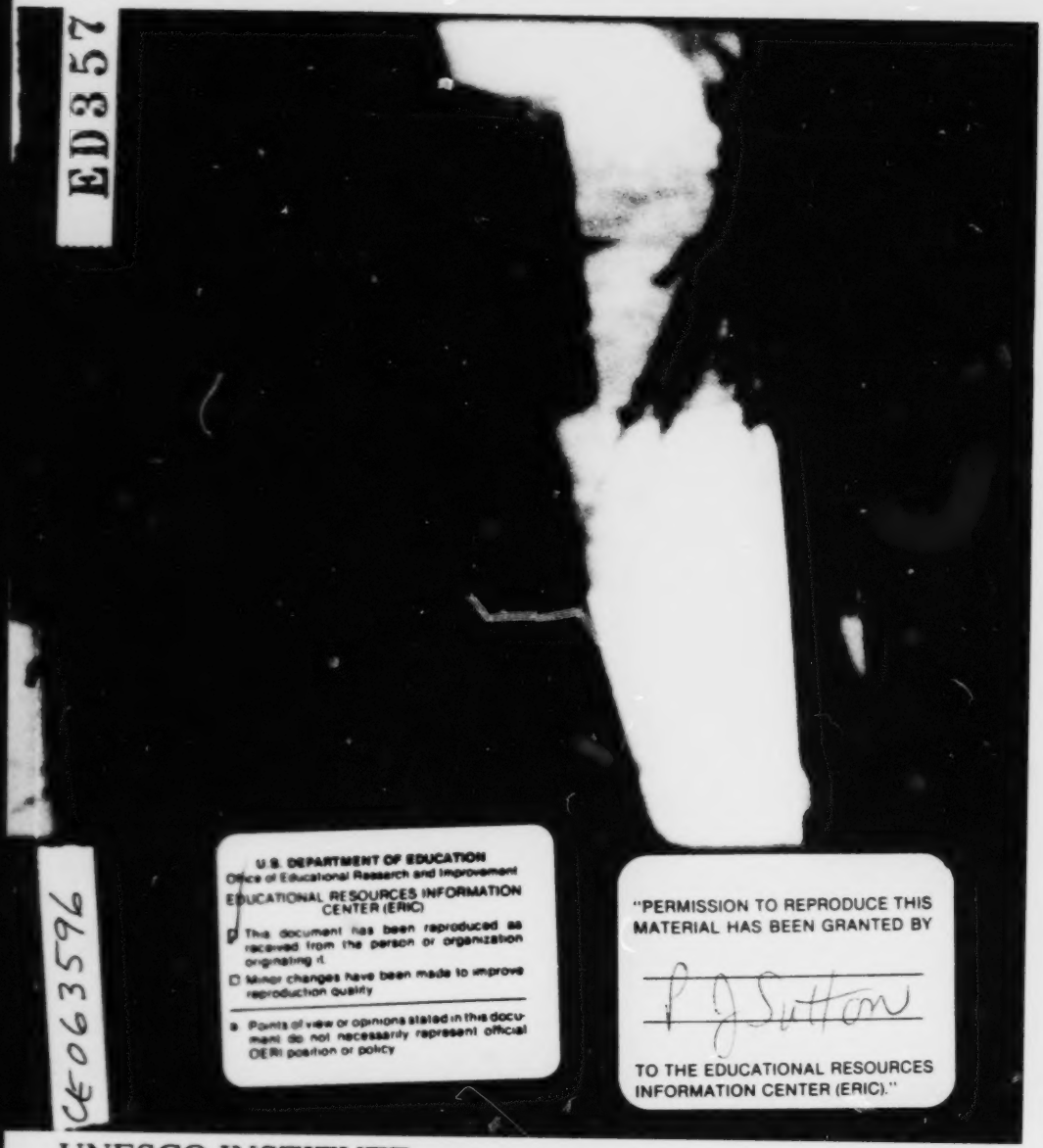

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ALPHA 92

Current Research in Literacy: Literacy Strategies in the Community Movement

Edited by

Jean-Paul Hautecoeur

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"Les balles rouges de l'espace"
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INTRODUCTION

Jean-Paul Hautecoeur

International Literacy Year, 1990, marked for many not a renewal of the mandate in the "fight against illiteracy", but rather the end of an affair. At least the end of an uncomplicated affair. It was during this time that the simplified phenomenon, known as "functional illiteracy", was formulated, and during which all kinds of offensive, healing or preventive measures were taken.

Fortunately, the situation has become more complex. Allegedly, the idea of illiteracy has been transformed into a many-sided issue with conflicting, expansive or regressive trends. It cannot be measured as is done for road accidents, or even for scholastic failures, nor do we know who has the most appropriate skills for treating it. In some countries, the various literacy initiatives have been channelled into regular adult education programs. In others, on the contrary, the area of activities has considerably expanded to include many different participants.

To understand the changes that have occurred in these recent international developments, a closer examination of popular movements in different regions was required. Popular associations had been responsible for the first initiatives in the literacy movement. They are still involved with practically the whole spectrum of current initiatives. This document focuses on the experiences of the popular movement, which started with a local event, simple in the beginning.

In 1980, at Val Morin, Quebec, the first international seminar on popular literacy was also the occasion of the first publication of *Alpha: ALPHA 80*. In 1991, in Namur, Belgium, a seminar brought together all the authors of *ALPHA 92*, under the common theme of the popular movement in literacy. Apart from the continuity of publication and the similarity of the theme, the two seminars were completely different events.

In 1980, militant volunteers gathered together to create a strong, committed movement, in an unoccupied and almost uncharted territory[1]. Ten years later, International Literacy Year demonstrated how much the theme of literacy had "caught on" in many industrial-

ized countries, especially in North America. Literacy has become a "dominant" ideological theme, crystallizer of social consensus, adopted by numerous and various organizations, and yet it has also already become commonplace. In several countries, it has been replaced by concerns that are closer to the economic market and employment, or has been integrated into the vast educational market.

After the climax of International Literacy Year - which not only enabled the work of literacy organizations to be recognized, but also revealed the current dominant trends, better identified the fringe elements and better indicated the crises - where was the independent literacy movement? Can it continue to be referred to as a specific movement, in the singular? What experimental and defining part is the literacy movement now playing? What places and what roles are being fulfilled by popular associations in different national contexts? What are they now saying about literacy? Which other players are they associated with, or would they like to be teamed up with? Why and for whom are they working? With what means and to what end?.

These questions are the main focus of *ALPHA 92*, under the generic heading *"Literacy Strategies in the Community Movement"*. Around fifteen different popular associations participated in the realization of the publication - from Belgium, Quebec, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Portugal and Spain - according to a process of program-based research, conducted locally by those who design the strategies, who test them out, who live them in all senses of the term.

Until now, the publications of the *ALPHA* collection had been put together from a distance, without the authors having the opportunity to meet. This time, we had the chance to get together for several days to share texts, to discuss experiences, to address the main local, regional and national issues. We also tried to find ways of maximizing the benefits of this meeting, the publication and the international network[2], under whose auspices this publication falls. (The last chapter gives an account of the seminar at Namur. A separate report will also be published in the series *UIE Reports* of the Unesco Institute for Education).

The experience of meeting, during the production of a group project such as this, proved to be a learning experience on several accounts. The table of contents takes on new aspects: real people; a retrospective dialogue on the manuscript; exchanges which lead

to a synthesis; bilateral, multilateral projects; long-lasting collaborative understandings; the search for more effective ways of distributing the publication; the considerable support that the international meeting gives to the hosts in the region; and the large network of partners that had to be established to realize the event.

In total, around thirty organizations actively collaborated in this global process of program-based research. The table of contents was multinational; the entire process became international, first of all, owing to the welcoming of the project by the Unesco Institute in Hamburg, and then through a new network of collaborators who give another dimension to that which we have called a "popular movement" for literacy.

Another important event occurred following the seminar at Namur: the UNESCO international seminar on literacy in industrialized countries, in December 1991, in Hamburg. This seminar aimed at evaluating the changes brought about since 1986 (date of the previous seminar), so as better to identify the major trends of today and the main research questions to be studied in the years to come[3]. Some of the main themes pointed out during this seminar were also at the heart of the concerns at Namur. It would be worthwhile to mention them briefly, because they define the international, sociopolitical context, which influences the focus of groups today.

First main observation: the meaning of the notion of literacy has changed considerably. It is used more and more in the plural form ("literacies"), so as better to incorporate and emphasize the diversity of linguistic and cultural practices between countries, and also within individual countries. Two major simplifications are to be deplored, because they have played down the older, more humanist and critical vision, which regards literacy as a fundamental endeavour of justice and social equality: the economic simplification, which tends to use literacy for technical ends in improving information processing skills in the economic sector, and the pedagogical simplification; this tends to create an independent sector of education, separate from social practices and cultural exchange, which provide individuals with a local and living sense of literacy.

Furthermore, the socially constructed myth of mass illiteracy, creator of a rising class of illiterates, is rejected in favour of a positive understanding of the differences in cultural practices and of the skills of individuals, and also in favour of pluralistic initiatives

in education, which emphasize the concepts of equal exchange, participation, cultural pluralism and human rights.

The second observation concerns policies. The field of literacy has become fragmented. The players, the organizations, and the sectors of activity, which are involved in the literacy movement and curriculums, are now numerous, diversified, in competition with each other - and sometimes in conflict. Two main trends militate against a general desire for collaboration between all the players: on one hand, the state control of curriculum, which leads to a uniform program, but one of universal accessibility; on the other hand, the privatization of the educational market, which results in subjecting literacy, first and foremost, to the calculation of profit. The two trends are not necessarily incompatible. It does occur, in fact, that government and private enterprise are sometimes joined in the same activity of ideological and economic monopolization of the new market.

In such cases, the quality of services is questionable; the working conditions of professionals do not improve or even worsen; the participation of those who use the services (also referred to as "clients") takes on a negative image in the form of constraints, or even of compulsory enrolment and of penalties for withdrawal; volunteer organizations are marginalized, often with no other option but to integrate into the government-run program, to compete according to the rules of the market place, to subcontract or even to close down.

New kinds of contracts are required between all the players in the literacy movement and governments, in the context of new cultural policies. These policies will have the role of preserving pluralism, the participation of all the players, the quality of services, the equality of working conditions, and especially the role of small, local associations in this continuous testing ground of education; and also of community action and cultural creativity, which are what literacy is all about.

The final observation concerns the *ALPHA* collection in particular. Regarding the area of current research to be carried out and supported, the seminar at Hamburg pointed out that, while institutional research for planning purposes above all has been commissioned and supported as well as costly, large-scale statistical surveys

- local research in literacy practice (program-based, participatory) is also important.

The seminar has also indicated the importance of conducting descriptive and comprehensive research on the daily practices of exchange and communication within different social groups in diversified contexts, as well as on the different literacy initiatives for which appropriate evaluation strategies should be perfected.

Reflecting the activity of this international meeting, and also the interactive current reality of the new multicultural Europe, the seminar in Hamburg has recommended that East/West and North/South co-operation be developed in terms of research, publishing and distribution, to serve national policies as well as local literacy organizations.

Following these reports on the present international context and the expressed willingness to take more effective action, *ALPHA 92* highlights the relevancy of the issues, according to orientations that do not always reflect the main trends and principal ideologies that determine national policies. Yes, the educational market has absorbed many literacy organizations. Yes, education policies have institutionalized and universalized (not everywhere!) the basic education services for adults. Yes, certain governments have relied heavily on popular movements, sometimes improving working conditions, but also increasing the financial burden. Is there still a place, and a justification, in the field of literacy (which varies from narrow to complex), for independent, non-profit organizations that are non-professionally licensed, and moreover, politically active?

Through detailed documentation on local experiences with literacy, *ALPHA 92* seeks to answer this question, which some have already dismissed as being anachronistic and outdated. Most of these initiatives are experiments, led by committed and motivated professionals - in collaboration with local players - who are seeking institutional or private support which guarantees the independence required for experiment.

Here is an important role that justifies long-term support of popular associations: participatory research, based on the local context and literacy methods that help individuals and communities to break out of "unequal exchange". Generally speaking, it is in terms of interaction in networks or circuits of exchange (economic, cultural, social, symbolic) that the right conditions for true literacy can be created. Joelle Dugailly expressed the same idea as follows:

"We are illiterate, we become illiterate, we remain illiterate, in spite of literacy classes, because we are not an integral part of the circuits of participation, of communication and of cultural and social, political and economic expression"[4]. Yet, these conditions can only come about through the creation of an experimental situation that deviates from the routine practices of education. Having the means is essential.

Another irreplaceable role, which is practically unavoidable for groups integrated into a community, area or neighbourhood, is to provide absolutely essential services: to respond to emergencies - above all in the areas of communication, representation and liaison. Linguistic training and job placement programs do not meet "social" survival needs, while the scope of exclusion is widening in all countries. Above and beyond training programs, and everywhere else - except in the limited area of formalized learning - there is a great need for reaching out to usually "non-aligned" groups. Yet, these services are relegated to voluntary operations or delegated to very short-term, temporary employment programs. These services are destined to the same fate as the people they are supposed to serve: exclusion.

A third equally unavoidable role of groups confronted with exclusion on a daily basis (which stand out owing to the obstacles created by illiteracy, under-qualification, technological inferiority) is the political expression of the voiceless. This role, which is indispensable in the practice of participatory democracy, especially in this case - where intolerable and desperate living conditions call for magic solutions - presupposes the support of popular education, whose goal is to facilitate the fundamental possibilities of democratic dialogue (a noble ideal for literacy!). It also involves the creation of new legitimate areas of expression and negotiation, which are difficult to acquire in the prevailing power set-up. This opening to political participation outside the party structure is a major role played by these groups, which work in the subtle area of participation, where many bridges have been torn down.

Symbolic exchange, or cultural/intercultural interaction through the various means of speech, writing, the body, images, music and other technological media, has been especially rejected from the difficult field of "functional" literacy. By creating a new class of "illiterates", the written code and the usefulness of textual practices have also been too much stressed. Popular associations work on the

fringes of strictly understood literacy, in a different way, not with "illiterates", but with those excluded from all sides, ("allographs", as Hélène Blais uniquely calls them[5]). Nor do they teach writing, but help to express that which is most profound, heartrending, desirable, in an individual way and in a collective history, by finding the right code, and by creating much sought after opportunities[6]. This cultural/intercultural role of literacy is played almost exclusively by the small and medium-sized associations, but it is rarely recognized and supported as a role of literacy.

The goal of this document is to increase awareness of current research into the popular movement, as pointed out in the main roles that have been mentioned. Apart from the authors and their associations, the following organizations helped in producing this document: the Literacy Service of the Quebec Department of Education, the Communications Branch of the same department, the Coordination Lire et écrire of the Belgian French Community, the Affaires internationales of the Belgian French Community, the Coordination Lire et écrire in Namur, the Fondation Roi Baudouin, the National Literacy Secretariat of the Canadian government, the Service of Continuing Education of the Spanish Department of Education, and the Unesco Institute for Education.

ALPHA 92 is part of the program-based research plan of the Unesco Institute for Education on literacy strategies in industrialized countries. This volume is also part of the publication of the *ALPHA-Literacy Research* collection, co-published by the Quebec Department of Education and the Unesco Institute in the original French version, with translation into English and Spanish. The entire research is part of the work program of the International Network of Literacy Specialists, coordinated by the Unesco Institute for Education in Hamburg.

Notes

1. Hautecoeur, Jean-Paul. 1980. *Alpha 80 - Compte-rendu du Séminaire sur l'alphabétisation populaire*. Montreal: Quebec Department of Education.

2. The International Network of Literacy Specialists, coordinated by the Unesco Institute for Education, provides the framework for the research on literacy strategies in industrialized countries.

3. *The Future of Literacy and The Literacy of the Future: Report of the Seminar on Adult Literacy in Industrialized Countries, UIE, Hamburg, 4-7 December 1991.* UIE Reports 9. 1992. Hamburg: Unesco Institute for Education.

4. Dugailly, Joelle. 1991. De l'Alpha ... à l'Omega. La pratique du chef-d'oeuvre en formation d'adultes. Brussels (Unpublished).

5. Blais, Hélène. 1992. Sur les chemins allographes. Pour une vision renouvelée de l'analphabétisme et de l'alphabétisation. Montreal (Unpublished).

6. Gatti, Armand. 1992. Mon théâtre, mes films, qu'est-ce que c'est? *Le Monde diplomatique*, February; Bellet, Alain. 1991. La riposte des exclus. *Le Monde diplomatique*, December.

ILLITERACY
DIRECTION? ACTION? RESULTS?

Jean-Paul Hautecoeur
Unesco Institute for Education
Hamburg, Germany

International Literacy Year was an attempt to renew efforts in the battle against illiteracy throughout the world. In both the Northern and the Southern hemispheres, the problem and the battle are similar although the fight is much more intense in the South.

The same word could be used to describe the phenomenon in both hemispheres although in the North we add an adjective with a technical connotation: "functional" illiteracy (the French use a different term - "*illettrisme*" - a term not used in Belgium or in Quebec). The difference between North and South is simply one of degree or place in the historic "continuum" of the long journey from the primitive (or infant) state of illiteracy to the developed (or adult) state of universal and functional literacy.

The purpose of this paper is to simplify the issue of literacy in industrialized countries. This is a *multi-faceted* issue because it involves very different national contexts; it is *complex* because it involves conflicting social and ideological facts; it is a *changing* issue but it cannot simply be described as a movement of linear evolution on a single historical path.

The issue will be presented in a very general way. What do we mean by illiteracy - functional or dysfunctional - in industrialized countries? What type of action is taken in fighting what is called the "battle against illiteracy"? What are the visible effects and results of the battle, more in terms of meaningful social change than in terms of individual learning?

Illiteracy in Industrialized Countries

The use of the term is very different depending upon the professional group using it, depending upon national "traditions" and depending upon your standpoint. Here is a preliminary list:

1. *Illiteracy - no education or low levels of education*

The criteria which determine the degree and frequency of illiteracy in a region or a country are: school attendance, length of schooling and educational mobility. These criteria are valid for both adults and children. Standards for promotion set by the school system have the value of an initiation rite. The only variable is the level of difficulty, which is constantly increasing: the minimum level was 4 or 5 years, the equivalent of the primary level; it now tends to 9 to 12 years, equivalent to the end of secondary school, where standards have also increased.

In North America, it is still common to equate total illiteracy with a low level of education at the primary level and functional illiteracy with a low level of education at the secondary level.

Thus, in Quebec, the national adult literacy program is superimposed on the basic training program for young people and is supposed to achieve the same objective: a secondary school diploma[1].

In Portugal where illiteracy still often means no schooling, the adult literacy program's minimum aim is a primary school diploma.

2. *"Illettrisme" - mediocre or inadequate ability to read*

The French have split the concept of illiteracy, which, after a century of obligatory schooling, was deemed inappropriate or unsuitable. It is now applied only to the immigrant population. "*Illettrisme*", the term used to describe French nationals who have attended school, has taken on the meaning of the official definition inspired by the expression used by the *Association française pour la lecture* (AFL): it means mediocre reading ability measured in terms of speed.

Attending school clearly does not make all students good readers. The unfortunate result is that of the one in six adults who do not make use of the written word (are non-readers), approximately half cannot read. This technical meaning given by the French to the concept of "*illettrisme*" has also produced the substitute concept of eliminating illiteracy: "*lecturisation*"[2].

3. *Functional Illiteracy - ineffective use of the written word in practical aspects of daily life*

What then are the basic skills deemed necessary to be able to "function" in American society today? This expandable group of basic skills includes the practical ability to solve ordinary problems of daily life which require basic use of the written word in the national language but also some familiarity with the cultural context of the problems posed, the way in which they are presented, etc. It is a measure of the ability to adapt to situations which are considered to be typical of life in that country, rather than abstract linguistic ability or linguistic ability applied in a very narrow context, such as at school or the workplace.

According to the criteria of minimal ability, an individual may have gone to school, be perfectly literate and even be considered well-read in the original cultural context, but be considered functionally illiterate within North American society. As we have seen, this usage embraces a socio-semiotic register which is much broader than the linguistic or even academic register. It is estimated that between one adult out of three and one adult out of five respectively is functionally illiterate in Canada and the United States[3].

4. *Residual Illiteracy - deficiency, handicap, maladjustment*

The vast range of pathological problems is fertile ground for the concept of illiteracy, especially among professionals in the fields of rehabilitation, re-education, and compensatory education, etc. This "clinical" use of complete or functional illiteracy is particularly prevalent in Northern Europe as well as in Germany and Austria and is common wherever literacy has been developed as a speciality in adult education programs. It is also evident in "special" branches of the normal school system where many educators retrained in adult literacy got their training.

In this sense, illiteracy is a residual rather than a generalized difficulty, a group of individual technical problems to be dealt with in a specialized environment. The fact that such problems are found among adults justifies making prevention a priority, identifying and dealing with these problems as early as possible. Hence developments in the "battle against *'illettrisme'*" in certain psychiatric

institutions, in the theoretical and clinical side of cognitive psychology, in pre-school and extra-curricular activities[4].

5. *Illiteracy - characteristic of certain cultural, national or immigrant minorities*

Although illiteracy may be considered abnormal in the indigenous population, it may be accepted as a recurring, majority and "normal" fact for some linguistic minorities whose mother tongue is essentially oral and is considered foreign in that country. Illiteracy is an ethnocentric attribute projected onto cultural minorities who form the local element of the Third World, who are "ghettoized", and are not well-received in national institutions, where they have positions on the domestic staff only or are poorly integrated in the dominant society because of contradictions in a situation involving bilingualism, etc.

Examples are the Gypsies in Europe, North Africans in France, Haitians in Quebec, Francophones in Canada outside Quebec, Amerindians, etc. The ostensible denial of difference is a permanent condition of intercultural conflicts, which are often solved by acculturation, assimilation - what is known as inevitable integration, at the risk of exclusion.

Linguistic relegation of such minorities to an oral and private mother tongue, which is a symbol of their illiteracy in the receiving society ("receiving society" is meant as a benevolent term), may lead to different methods of refusing to become literate in the dominant language, or a vague desire to become literate as a way of showing resistance to the mother tongue, renewed demands for rights, services, allocated jobs, etc.[5]

6. *Illiteracy - being under-qualified or down-graded in a given work situation*

The relationship between linguistic competence and the job market is especially obvious in periods of structural unemployment: this has been the case in most industrialized countries for the past decade. The growth of basic training programs whose aim is vocational reintegration corresponds to technological transformations that affect most industrial sectors as well as to new requirements for professional qualifications[6].

The direct relationship between competence and employability and productivity is, however, only one aspect of the major issue of training. It has often been said that the demand for unskilled labour (or what is described pejoratively as illiterate) was greater in the growing service sector than the demand, in equivalent positions, for a better educated national labour force which demands higher salaries, better social benefits, more mobility, etc.

Basic training programs, upgrading programs, vocational training and retraining have, in many countries, become a requirement before one can receive unemployment benefits or social assistance, or before one can qualify, not directly on the job market but as employable by agencies dealing with under-employment. Eliminating illiteracy has become a new formula for time management for the unemployed: that is a realistic description given by many literacy professionals.

7. *Illiteracy - cultural aspects of poverty, a symbol of more or less generalized exclusion*

The international association ATD-Quart-Monde, and many others, have for a long time associated illiteracy with serious poverty. The association is very negative about the "rags and tatters" sub-culture of the "fourth world", a culture whose "trademark" is the cast-offs accepted for the sake of survival or out of resistance to radical exclusion.

The fourth world has grown considerably in industrialized societies over the past twenty years: "the new poor", young people and old people excluded in larger numbers from the networks of socio-economic exchange, excluded from traditional communities; immigrants in urban centres or in ghettoized suburbs who are not even members of the proletariat; immigrants' children who are headed toward delinquency because of their refusal to be socialized in a monocultural society.

In this context, illiteracy takes on a symbolic rather than objective value: it really means having an identity outside social conventions rather than a linguistic deficiency or handicap. It symbolizes forced marginality, exclusion from social, cultural, economic and political networks.

Socio-cultural intervention in these areas is many-faceted and must be adapted to priorities. Language learning and basic training

are often considered secondary while other services are considered essential. The approach used in a literacy program is not the same as the approach used in a formal education program: literacy programs are a type of cultural activity aimed at enabling people to express an identity, to claim and receive recognized basic rights and to organize their own survival. In the vocabulary of public services this is known as "social integration"[7].

8. *Secondary Illiteracy - generalized effect of mass culture on "silent majorities"*

This last meaning, in a list which is far from complete, may be seen as semantic abuse or it can be taken seriously. It supposes a careful analysis of the market of cultural products, communication infrastructures, public and private production and broadcasting policies, private means of consuming these messages, etc. It refers to the masses who watch the same television program at the same time in the same country, under the stimulus of tobacco, alcohol and subliminal advertising. It refers to a mechanical, obedient type of literacy, gratefully received, unintended by the broadcaster, non-selective, non-critical. It also refers to universal education through stereotypical programs which reach derelict environments, workers who are discouraged and depressed, and it refers to conflicts which are either suppressed or silenced, whose youthful participants are also the most avid consumers of television.

Today a clear example of this type of dying "literacy" is particularly evident in what was communist Europe. In the West, only a minority of intellectuals see it this way and are concerned about it. Can this type of analysis only be explained as a view of secondary literacy accepted by a few cliques, as was formerly the case for the small number of people who were educated? The question deserves to be examined.[8]

***

Therefore, it is difficult to talk about illiteracy in the singular. Reducing it to a universal phenomenon is a mythical function or a militant strategy. Using statistics to prove the point can also amount to political demagoguery or journalistic mis-information.

Illiteracy is essentially a social theory: a set of ideological facts. What is important is to know who created the theory rather than whom it applies to, and why the theory was developed by a particular group. What is the theory good for, and whom does it serve?

The reason why we have traced this path is to show that social definitions or their uses are varied, that they can be contradictory and antagonistic. Another study might analyze how groups and their various theories converge on certain occasions, how they can come together to create a consensual litany for the purpose of a particular celebration such as International Literacy Year.[9]

What many of these theories have in common is the coercive function of their convictions. The ability to convince others that the problem is serious and that something must be done about it; the ability in particular to convince those who are illiterate that they must recognize the fact. That is the main ideological reason for efforts at eliminating illiteracy: to convince the individual that he is what you say he is, and then to transform him from victim to beneficiary.

In order to understand the recent phenomenon of illiteracy in the professional, journalistic and political discourse of industrialized countries, it is useful to change camps. To see how the problem is perceived from the other side, to see whether "the problem" is being talked about and what is being said about it[10]. Variations of cultural practices, representations and values are much greater than those between one professional group and another. Illiteracy is denied. The means and methods of communicating by the usual networks are effective. Individuals generally know how to deal with written communications. It is rare for an individual to seek the benefit of a training program. To quote a literacy professional who obviously knows his public well: "The majority of illiterate people do not attach much importance to our efforts . . . To put it crudely, "the illiterate" do not want to become literate. That is not their aim, it is ours."[11]

Finally, in this complex but unequal game of multiple and antagonistic interactions, illiterates are simply a small minority of those who realize that that is what they are in other peoples' eyes. These people have found a raison d'être in a negative, internalized identity. There are such people. They are the voluntary specimens of illiteracy and they tell their story to journalists. Their main

function is to convince others. They play a crucial role in demonstrating the necessity and benefits of eliminating illiteracy[12].

Actions Undertaken in the "Battle against Illiteracy"

Globally, we are dealing with an area of activity which has been increasing over the past twenty years in the United States for example, and for a decade in most European countries.

There is remarkable enthusiasm for *mobilizing* campaigns to fight against illiteracy. There are many associations which have invested in this work. In North America, in the UK, in Ireland, in Belgium and in France, such associations are still doing most of the work to eliminate illiteracy by providing either volunteers or grants. In addition to established organizations whose sole purpose is the elimination of illiteracy, powerful new lobbies have appeared which do not have a particularly charitable vocation: for example, libraries, the book and paper industry, the press, business organizations, humanist, nationalist, cultural movements involved in the field of education and trade unions. These groups act directly by offering services to the public; they are especially active in providing information, mobilizing, making people aware, putting pressure on public authorities, supporting organizations on the front line.

Many countries regard the elimination of illiteracy as a *national priority*. They are investing more and more resources and public services in this field. Commitments vary from country to country:

- legislation creating a special sector to deal with illiteracy or basic education in the field of adult education (e.g. the Netherlands, Portugal, Germany, Quebec)[13];

- in the form of grants to provincial authorities or to non-governmental organizations supported by public information campaigns, mobilization, recruitment (e.g. the United States, Canada, the UK)[14];

- in the form of training programs, varying according to economic and social circumstances, and depending upon the policies of the parties in power; these programs are generally administered by non-governmental organizations on a contractual basis (e.g. France and the French Community in Belgium)[15];

- reinforcement of activities designed to prevent illiteracy in the field of special or compensatory education, in school and in the community, at the pre-school level, alternating with periods of employment, etc. (e.g. Sweden, Denmark, but also to varying degrees in the other countries)[16]

The consequence or corollary of these developments in voluntary societies and by the public authorities is clearly a significant increase in the area of *training*. What we are seeing is the professionalization of an activity which originally was basically voluntary and militant. We are witnessing a structure developing around jobs in this field, knowledge of the area, training of the teachers, etc. University and private research in this sector is expanding. Witness the number of theses written on the subject, or the increase in the number of bibliographical references.

Two contrary movements can be observed. On the one hand, as a result of the many different interventions, the field has expanded, the market has opened up and there has been interdisciplinary investment. On the other hand, the field has become more closed and is subject to professional regulation and incorporation into the clearly defined sector of education. In some countries one or the other tendency prevails; in others, the two compete with one another.

There has been an increase in activity and an increase in the *public involved*, but also the catchment area has expanded. Literacy, basic training, upgrading, social and professional integration now affect "clients" of all ages whose socio-professional status varies - employed or unemployed, free or institutionalized (psychiatric institutions, prisons, various types of homes, etc.), handicapped or non-handicapped, homophones and allophones, primary and even post-secondary levels. (In Quebec, for example, a literacy journal - Literacy across the Curriculum - is published by a college for an audience of pre-university students).

The image is that of a professional field which enjoys a particularly strong boost and which has shown steady growth since its inception. One might expect that the amount of money spent in this area would reflect this growth. But it is universally true that that is certainly not the case. Rather, the pattern has been to decrease funds for basic training, to redirect funds into training programs which are clearly more "effective", more in tune with the job market. Even where basic training has been institutionalized,

professionalization has usually meant that the job has a *precarious status* rather than creating equality with working conditions of educators working in the regular and adult education sectors. With a few exceptions (the Netherlands?), professionals working in the field of literacy have not, despite the growth in the field, had their status reevaluated. In many countries, most basic activities are still community-based and are totally or partially voluntary. And where the private sector is involved in training, its priorities follow the demands of the job market, and national policies lead to selective, technical training. Thus socio-cultural intervention is abandoned as being pointless.

A typology of the principal approaches to literacy in Europe and in North America would identify the various tendencies as follows:

- the traditional *Anglo-Saxon* approach - *individual assistance* given by volunteers in the context of a local organization or in the very structured context of a national or international organization. This approach may be either independent or integrated into a public adult education system;

- the *school* approach, whose learning objectives are the same as those of schools, and which tends to be organized in "harmony" with the regular stream of national education. Adult education may be different, especially in theory and because of its "adult education" practices. However, structurally, it operates within the system of education, and it obeys that system's basic standards and guidelines (e.g. Quebec);

- the *ABE* approach (Adult Basic Education), a pragmatic model of basic education, relatively autonomous as compared to the regular school system, able to provide all basic adult education of an "academic", civic, professional, practical, physical, etc. nature. In such a flexible context (which may become a national program, e.g. in the Netherlands), the linguistic and cultural concept of literacy is included in the multi-faceted concept of basic skills;

- the *socio-professional integration/reintegration* approach is defined by its objectives rather than by an administrative framework or course content. Its basic purpose is access to employment. This

is a multi-faceted approach to training which may be the responsibility of a variety of public sectors (social, economic, manpower) rather than the educational system. This can mean (especially in France) considerable expansion in community-based and private sector training;

- the *popular education/community action* or socio-cultural approach, also known as the holistic approach, of integrated development and, in its most political version, the awareness approach. This means various local efforts by associations whose objectives are defined in terms of the individuals concerned. Literacy belongs to the linguistic and cultural register and is closely related to the personal and social history of the group and the neighbourhood. The aim is to understand that history and to relate it in order to improve it or change it;

- the *cultural/intercultural* approach consists of acting on the material, organizational and imaginary context of a locality, region, or social group rather than educating individuals directly: by creativity, cultural productions, improving communication networks, libraries, presenting demands or political lobbying, developing cultural industries, etc. In different cultural and linguistic environments, these activities may consist of creating an intercultural environment or demanding rights and the means of achieving those rights.

The new multi-ethnic urban environments in industrialized countries require, sometimes urgently, that theories and practices pertaining to the elimination of illiteracy be expanded. This may involve radical changes in national cultural traditions:

- the *preventive, or extra-curricular, or inter-generational* approach. The significant aspect of this approach is its international tendency to remove literacy programs from the professional sectors of more or less formal training and put them in a social context, in a setting where children learn - or should learn - to speak, to read, to communicate, to use books, tools and sources of information, etc. This system is organized on the periphery of the school system - parents' school, homework school - but also farther and farther away - store-front libraries, activities in

day care centres in underprivileged areas, ecological or historical community projects involving both young and old, etc.;

- there is still the entire sector of *special education*, for example the hearing impaired, the visually impaired, learning disabled, emotionally disturbed. In some countries, this sector is integrated into broadly based literacy programs. It may even be the dominant factor and may therefore contribute to giving a medical and rather "clinical" meaning to literacy, new ground for the activities of psychotherapists.

In conclusion, the variety of efforts at eliminating illiteracy are still largely experimental. University departments and research centres which are interested in this field and devote themselves entirely to it, are multiplying and diversifying. However, symbolically and economically, literacy professionals have not, in actual fact, risen in status.

Literacy has become a little banal. It has lost some of its power to attract and mobilize people. Politically, the issue of illiteracy now attracts new conservative groups rather than left-wing groups. It may help mobilize resistance to the erosion of values, our heritage, and the national language, more than it helps in the battle against poverty or in intercultural needs. The focus is no longer, or very little, on international development activities. People in literacy circles are becoming more and more cynical and saying that the point of institutionalization is mainly to "better integrate people in their marginality" and to monitor the dangers of exclusion as inexpensively as possible[17].

Results

Clearly what we must do is to gear down. Each type of program has its own objectives which justify being evaluated separately. But also, an evaluation of the results, even in a general way, of literacy activities presumes that it is possible to specify the relevant providers: planners and decision-makers from the public services, political staff, training professionals, community movements; and the target public: victims or beneficiaries of the services offered, depending on how they are analyzed.

The issue also implies that their other functions, or social purposes, should be questioned. These will be seen to have clear meaning if we know the history and the context from which they emerged. Schematically, and perhaps with provocative nuances, it can be said that the results of literacy measures according to the principal theoretical objectives, are, *if not nil, then frankly mediocre*. Officially, literacy advocates and their organizations show results which are "presentable". However, if we apply methodical observation and post-operational self-criticism, we will get the following type of testimony:

> Despite all our pedagogical strategies and efforts, literacy remains a problem with little likelihood of a solution. No young person has left the "Boîte à lettres" knowing how to read and write properly.[18]

> Clearly there has been some success from literacy activities. But, frankly, success has been marginal and these efforts do not get at the root of the problem.[19]

From the "learner's" point of view, despite positive and even enthusiastic reactions to the friendly atmosphere in many literacy centres, we must face the fact that *the learner's basic expectations are very different from the objectives set by the services*. They do not express themselves in terms of education, language or integration but rather in terms of participation, communication, relationships and human sentiments or in terms of social rights, the right to work or the right to housing, etc. Linguistic demands are usually just an excuse, a tactic to get on a par with those providing services which may be useful in other ways; or even the simple answer to an offer which has the legitimacy of knowledge, the power of definition. Thus a formal teaching service which is therapeutic and "professional" may actually *exclude most learners* - a general observation which is recognized by many of these organizations.

There is a radical incompatibility between provision and demand for literacy. Demand is simply prescribed by the provision, and the principal effect is to obscure the reality of that demand. There is no historical demand for literacy on the part of the illiterate, a fact which is difficult to grasp positively. The demand has been created by people who do not see themselves as literate, educated, included or integrated, but as social workers, educators or trainers. These

socio-professional identities have been built on an artificial negation. When? why? and how? would be the subject of another very interesting study[20].

Thus one of the most obvious results of the literacy campaigns and literacy tools has been to *create a new class of citizens* who have been declared incompetent, who feel badly about themselves, etc., but who are salvageable, educable, retrainable. The sociologists, the statisticians, the journalists have proven and measured the existence of this. Their estimates are on the upgrade.

Is this a new class or a new label for the poor and the excluded? A class supposes a classification. And it is not unimportant that a class should express itself in cultural terms rather than in economic terms. There is no other immediate solution to socio-professional downgrading, to temporary and long-term unemployment. The only solution is educational, cultural ideological action. Its function is to shame the victim personally by his own incompetence; persuade him that his disqualification is not his destiny and that the solution is within his grasp; integrate him into a network of services which communicate with other networks while awaiting a temporary solution; in short, *occupy the excluded in a positive way to block and neutralize revolt.*[21]

The strategy is not new. Literacy campaigns have appeared where it has become necessary to manage large numbers more effectively by persuasion rather than by force. This is done by linguistic unification, a broad brush offensive which is technical, technological, ideological and political in nature[22]. If we examine literacy campaigns from a sociological point of view, it becomes clear that such efforts must be unified: to speak of literacy campaigns, in the plural, at the same time and in the same social (or national) space amounts to provocation! Therefore intercultural ideas/actions are not looked on favourably if they demand differences and plurality when management strategies are unitary[23].

More than one observer has expressed surprise that literacy campaigns are necessary in industrialized countries. For a long time there has been linguistic peace, aside from some "regional conflicts" (Canada and Belgium for example). And universal schooling has long since been achieved. There are still some isolated cultural minorities who are poorly integrated although they are in the process of becoming settled. So why are there so many people who are

illiterate (between 10 and 40% of adult national populations), and what is the point of efforts to mount new literacy campaigns?

Education and cultural action, having replaced the Church in these functions, have enormous powers of consensus and enormous potential for effectiveness. How were these new illiterates created? There is no lack of explanations: rise in the standards of qualifications, skills declared inadequate, inadequate schools, mass culture, personal difficulties and handicaps, etc. Because of the serious social crises which affect all industrialized countries today, the old strategy of cultural and moral mobilization has been reactivated. A placebo would be just as effective.

We should look for results not in the activities of literacy campaigns but in *the ideological effects of literacy campaigns*. Same danger, same battle. Literacy campaigns are largely motivated by a generous and virtuous consensus. That is its most important function[24].

As has already been pointed out, the other logical result is a *remarkable growth in the professional sector of basic training*. This has been particularly welcome in countries where money and jobs in the field of education have decreased. It has been a good thing for much of the community movement when responsibility for these activities has been transferred from volunteers to sub-contractors and even sometimes to private enterprise. It has provided prolonged if not permanent retraining for many social, socio-cultural and socio-political workers demobilized during the heyday of liberalism.

Growth, but also *research and experimentation* in local activities and organizations are more effective because institutional objectives have been transformed into objectives renegotiated locally, redefined and taken over again by more organic networks of communication and solidarity. The field of literacy is also fertile ground for *experiments in participatory democracy* at a local, multicultural level. As we have seen, literacy professionals still have a precarious, marginal and heterogeneous status as compared to organizations made up of social, educational and cultural activists. And although the available resources sometimes tend to become institutionalized so that "specifications" are more tightly controlled, there are still many unresolved issues - there is room to manoeuvre between technical control and anthropological adventure in the game of language and in the game of languages[25].

However, from the point of view of literacy organizations, the picture is not all rosy. Organizations which jumped on the bandwagon of national policies and programs, especially with training programs in education and employment, have benefited from the growth. On the other hand, *popular organizations involved in education*, independent community action groups and socio-cultural action groups, *have been marginalized*. In certain national contexts where all public monies are devoted to basic training programs, such organizations have had no choice in the shorter term but to integrate or shut down[26].

Should the general fact that the individuals targeted do not respond, or give up when they have just responded out of suffering or poverty, be considered a negative result? The answer must be yes when the effect of such failures is *reinforcing campaigns of recruitment, using coercive measures to register people*, making attendance obligatory (as at school, military service, or even religious functions), imposing *negative sanctions* such as reducing or withdrawing social assistance if the individual is absent or quits. When programs have been created, when public resources have been invested and when there is a consensus about the necessity of being literate, failing to respond may become an offence[27].

Illiteracy is neither a neutral nor a stable condition. If it is not treated - some claim that the solution is simple and universally available - there is a risk of delinquency. In the United States, it is common to describe illiterates as "a population at risk" (title of a report by President Reagan: "A Nation at Risk"). To use an historical analogy: "Working Class, Dangerous Class" was an expression used more than a century ago in Europe. In Canada, it is also often said that the highest rate of illiteracy in our population is found in the prison population and that, therefore, illiteracy creates criminals.

To conclude on a less strident note, we must also recognize that the domestication of illiteracy, as Paulo Freire said, has fertilized its antithesis (or its parasites, to be less dualistic, or in other words, more monistic), *cultural experimentation in the fertile field of language*. Aside from the training market, there are writing workshops, local newspapers, productions and publications in the local language and history, poetry contests, opportunities for correspondence and international exchanges, "free" community radio where the illegal may become a public message, adventures in

collective writing presented as theatre to recreate the equivalent of the mysteries of the Middle Ages. Popular culture has gained a little space for production, expansion and legitimacy replacing programs in continuing education. Foreign cultures have also been able to gain a little elbow-room, without folklore masks or a special permit[28].

Less visible, less spectacular, but no less active has been the work of the community movement in organizing, coordinating, liaising, representing, and in making demands for autonomy, representation and effectiveness. It is certainly important to have brought about "political" changes at the local and regional levels in the relations between "passive" populations and public authorities[29]. And so, how and to what extent has the advent of national literacy campaigns helped to transform communications by developing alternative networks? To what extent have literacy campaigns for public salvation also generated, thanks to the reappropriation of some funds and the means of communication by those designated as victims, their own antidote - literacy campaigns of resistance?[30] One of the most interesting questions to explore.

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BASIC EDUCATION AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Pierre Georis
Centre d'information et
d'éducation populaire, Brussels, Belgium

This paper presents a report on a series of pilot projects conducted in Wallonia (Belgium) on job integration for disadvantaged groups.

The conclusions drawn in a variety of papers on the subject of associations and literacy as a social phenomenon outside Belgium are cumulative: there are many striking similarities in the projects themselves and the problems experienced. Although the project on which this paper is based is geographically specific, there appears to be a common thread running through the actual situations discussed here.

One postulate is essential to the argument which follows: the vision guiding any advances made in the geographic area in which the project was conducted must be a positive vision. Although this statement may seem naive, it is justified for the area in question.

Wallonia, my home state, is a land of old industries and large companies, of grinding work which destroyed our parents' health, and killed a good many of them. Social conflict has frequently been extremely harsh, and the recession has hit very hard: a number of regions are real disaster areas. For years Walloons have been experiencing company closures. In the past 20 years, all discussion of domestic matters has had one focus: the recession. From all the discussion, the causes of the situation have gradually emerged and, as a result, tentative suggestions for ways to get out of it. The unhappy consequence of all the discussion, and its underlying connotation of decline, is that the Walloons now have a very negative image of themselves and their future.

Although discussions of recession have certainly not disappeared, there has been a gradual upsurge in discussion of (re)development. This is quite a radical change in viewpoint, the consequences of which are still far from clear. But if it is true that troop morale is decisive to victory, talking about and hearing about development is

obviously more stimulating than hearing about recession and the notion of worker resistance.

The hypothesis underlying this paper may be stated in the following terms: *new forms of social assistance (including literacy) must be based in part on economic development.*

Formulated in these terms, the hypothesis leads us directly to the subject of employment-training integration.

Near Consensus on the Importance of Training

One outstanding feature of recession management throughout the 1980s has been the permanence of the training-employment debate. The key word in the debate has incontestably been "integration", usually qualified as both social and vocational. Literacy is at the heart of the debate, the terms of which are summarized in the following paragraphs.

The near consensus is essentially based on statistical fact: overall, the probability of being chronically unemployed is inversely proportional to level of education. Although this is an accepted fact, an employment policy which is strictly a training policy must be judged in the light of comments made by a number of observers[1]. In any event it is erroneous to believe in the existence of an automatic link between training and employment.

Of course a teenager who drops out of school and gets a job as a labourer has few prospects, especially if that teenager is a woman. But is unemployment due here to low level of education, massive cutbacks in blue-collar jobs, or to the fact that blue-collar jobs are held mainly by adults and become available only in dribs and drabs as the adults who hold them retire? If the teenager is a woman, is it due to the fact that blue-collar jobs are held almost exclusively by men? Or is it because the teenager has the bad luck to belong to a very large age group? These are only a few of the possibilities.

Conducting an analysis of unemployment inevitably instils prudence because of the large number of interlocking factors involved. Furthermore, although it is true that additional training gives additional protection against unemployment, it does not follow that the unemployment problem can be solved exclusively by training: raising the level of education of each individual does not create a single new job (with teachers perhaps the only, and

marginal, exception). In fact the effect is essentially an increase in individual competitiveness: where the total number of jobs remains unchanged, the more competitive individual replaces the less competitive one.

The training-job link is not automatic. This statement has several corollaries.

- On the average, fifteen years after entering the labour force, not more than one worker in two still practises the trade for which he or she was trained[2].

- The initial proposals can be countered by the observation that, in fact, never throughout history has the average level of education been as high as it is today.

  From this observation, a proposal exactly contrary to the usual one may be made: unemployment is currently such a serious problem because people have too much education (and unrealistically high expectations of the job market). This reverse argument, which we definitely do not support, has (because of its provocative aspect) heuristic importance: it demonstrates the error of conducting social analysis based on a simple cause/effect relationship.

- An unshakeable commitment to making "job" the automatic result of "training" can easily lead right up against a blank wall.

  Employers would have to be asked to define the jobs of the future and the training prerequisites for those jobs, a difficult task in the medium term.

  Although initiatives of this sort have been tried, results have been positive only in the very short term. Employers are able to say that they expect to hire when a position opens up, but they have no time to wait until a specific individual trains for a job, perhaps for three years. They have no idea what jobs will be open in five or ten years. If we wish to plan education in relation to the requirements of the economy, this is the scale that has to be considered. In practical terms, the task is impossible. The only option remaining is to go with the current and provide

instruction in new technologies. The individual's only option is to collect as broad a range as possible of diplomas and certificates, just in case.

In other words, although there is a link (from the individual viewpoint) between education and employment, an employment policy based solely on training would produce nothing more than a number of "communicating vessel" phenomena in the job market.

If the training-job link is valid at the micro-economic level (that of the individual), it is considerably more difficult to justify at the macro-economic level. This does not necessarily mean that an increase in the level of education is without macro-economic impact. On the contrary, it is virtually a condition of remaining in the technology race. The simple fact is however that, at the macro-economic level, the training-job link is not automatic: education does not automatically create jobs for all the unemployed.

The Primary Objective of Training Job Seekers is Social and Vocational Integration

Integration is always qualified as both social and vocational. The reasons for this should be examined: if the double qualification is justified, its value as a postulate is greater. At the very least, the following relationships are justified:

- Having a job means taking part in production. It also means having an income and being a consumer. Integration as a producer entails integration as a consumer.

- A job has a whole series of additional functions indispensable to psychological balance. A job imposes a time structure, a rhythm of life, on the individual. It provides the setting for social contacts outside the family and facilitates meaningful dialogue between individuals. It links the individual to projects and goals that transcend the personal (i.e. exceed individual goals). It defines the individual's social status and identity. It imposes action[3].

> A job performs so many functions simultaneously that it seems difficult to imagine how a household can be considered socially integrated unless at least one of its members is professionally integrated.

We are however in an evolving society, one in which the points of reference are changing. The possibility that all the functions of a job can be performed by some means other than a job cannot be discounted. However this may be, the lack of any practical alternative requires our support for the following statement: in today's world, vocational integration is the best form of social integration.

Exclusion is the result of many causes (e.g. problems related to employment, education, income, family), which interact with and impact on one another.

Ideally, it would be possible to consider all aspects at once. When faced with poverty, each intervener is a little like a photographer asked to take one (and only one) typical view of the main square in an old town. The photographer has a number of options: take a picture from each street leading into the square; try to fit the church and the town hall into one picture; photograph only the facade of the town hall, or a single detail of the façade; rent a helicopter and take an aerial view. Although each photograph presents an accurate view, whichever one is selected some aspects of the square are necessarily left out.

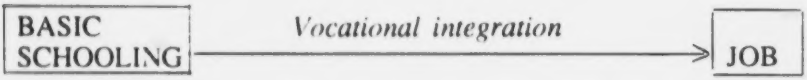
Faced with poverty, we are like that photographer: we must select one point of view. When interveners talk about social and vocational integration, it is a bit like locking the focus on "job". Two related aspects (education and income) are caught in the frame; everything else remains outside.

This is the angle from which this paper is written.

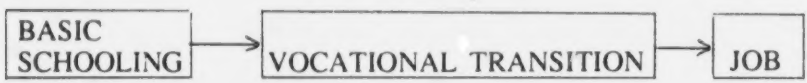
The Path to Integration

Our society has a specific conception of what it considers the ideal path to integration: when an individual completes basic schooling, he or she finds a job and occupies a position in the hierarchy, corresponding to the level of education reached in the educational hierarchy. It is as if society were made up of two boxes. Voca-

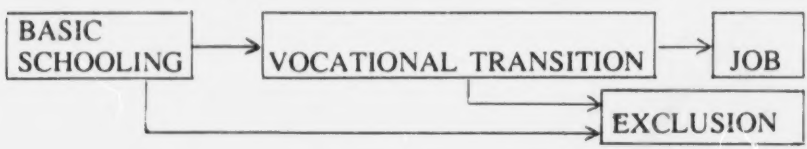
tional integration designates the individual's path from one box to the other.



One result of recession is the ever-widening gap between the number of regular job seekers and existing demand. This gap creates a variety of other phenomena: the young school-leaver does not find a regular job quickly; the individual who loses a job does not easily find another. A third box (known as *vocational transition*) appears between the other two. This third box is neither school nor job: an individual may take a casual job for a few months; take a course lasting a few weeks; collect unemployment insurance; have a part-time job that, if all goes well, will turn into a full-time one; or work part-time and take a course part-time. *Vocational transition is anything that is not a regular job but leaves room for the possibility that all doors leading to a regular job are not locked.* The situation is not limited to initial integration (integration on leaving school), but is repeated many times over the life of an individual[4].



The above definition of vocational transition allows for the possibility that some doors may be locked. This means that the diagram requires a fourth box (exclusion) to include all individuals who are unsuccessful in getting a job by any path, either direct (basic schooling to job) or indirect (vocational transition).



In my opinion (although there is no unanimity on this point), the exclusion box represents, not a homogeneous population, but three populations.

a) The group commonly known as the hard-core poor, formerly known as the sub-proletariat and today often called the fourth world. Unlike the classic proletariat, the sub-proletariat has never become integrated into production except on a short-term, temporary basis. This has two effects: low income (poverty) and non-integration into the collective defence structures of salaried individuals.

b) Many young people find themselves in the exclusion box, although their parents may (or may have) held productive jobs. The group consists largely of secondary school dropouts. In earlier times they would have been able to find labourers' jobs somewhere; today they are largely unprovided for. Because they are not eligible for unemployment benefits, their situation is extremely difficult if they are not on good terms with their parents.

c) The third group is made up of individuals sliding from vocational transition toward exclusion. These people are not eligible for unemployment benefits or have been unemployed for such a long time that it is unrealistic to continue considering their status as transitional.

These observations indicate that the exclusion box is culturally non-homogeneous, even though all the situations involved may be defined economically: the fourth world culture is not the same as the culture of a young person who has never worked or of someone who formerly held a regular job. The second and third situations are those experienced by what is often called the new poor. It is very important that this be understood before any action is taken: a series of measures may be effective for some of the excluded, but totally ineffective for the others.

This development suggests two goals for action.

a) Assistance to children and families, especially at the community level (e.g. after-school classes, creative expression centres, shop-front libraries), to avoid the slide from basic schooling toward exclusion.

b) Assistance to the under-educated who are again unemployed:

- by highly effective management of the vocational transition phase to provide them with job access; or

- for individuals who have fallen into the exclusion box, by taking the measures required for them to break out of its confines and at least move up to the vocational transition box (or even move directly into a job)[5].

The Popular Education Experience

As we have seen, a job is not the only reason for education. There is justification for making a distinction between the objectives of education and the objectives of employment. An education policy strives to find a delicate balance between individual fulfilment and training in everything required for community living: training as such (there really are things that have to be learned), and more purely educational aspects that enable the individual to be a citizen, understand his or her society and play an active part in it. This means that teaching is primarily philosophical and ethical in nature, before becoming a scientific project. There is no getting away from a debate on values. (What must be taught? What is the ideal status of the student or trainee on completion of the program?)

Generally speaking, it is safe to say that all our experience in the community association movement points to the conclusion that *democratic ethical values must be affirmed.* There must be a defined minimum level of education: education is a *right* which must be the same for everyone. Those who have not reached that level in school must be given the opportunity to do so at some later date. This right to education is considered to be comprehensive, i.e. affecting the whole person. This viewpoint is diametrically opposed to that underlying the type of project which, since it considers an assembly line worker who repeats a single motion for eight hours to be integrated, merely trains individuals in weekly reiterating one particular operation. Our educational objectives are far broader than this kind of training and have an entirely different focus[6].

The common aims referred to in the preceding paragraph are those underlying what is known as popular education (sometimes

called lifelong education). The framework is ideal for literacy programs. Because the concept, although valuable, is relatively unknown, a brief explanation is in order. We go on to demonstrate that literacy has a further strategic function in a regional policy aimed at vocational integration of disadvantaged individuals and, more generally, in the collective definition of a new development policy.

The concept of popular education covers a broad spectrum of educational and collective experience at the community level and is based on ethical values. Its characteristics are the following:

a) At the outset, there is an ethical principle, which must be clearly stated. The labour movement works actively to counteract the fatalism which allows the lower levels of society to be exploited and excluded from active citizenship (and from the possibility of taking part in public decision-making).

b) The battle may be waged in many ways, all of which can complement one another (e.g. legislative action by a political party, public statement by a pressure group). Popular education is a type of action aimed directly at the community as such. Because of this, it is different from the action of a political party or a pressure group (e.g. an association which regularly speaks for consumers on the basis of the results of surveys conducted by technicians, but does not organize consumer groups). If a pressure group does take action on popular education, that action will give public expression to the opinions gathered by actually working with community groups.

c) While the popular education experience is educational or pedagogical, it is also a kind of collective action. Its main feature is the refusal of predetermined content, i.e. content defined exclusively by persons other than the interested parties themselves. The first step is to admit that the individual knows and understands his or her own experience. The individual faces specific problems in a specific situation: he or she is not likely to embark on an education program without some assurance of finding solutions to these problems. Popular education operates at a number of levels. Understanding often takes a very long time, and requires a knowledge of the environment (e.g. com-

pany, neighbourhood, hospital); familiarity with the actual problems faced by the people; formulation of a possible solution to these problems; making sure that supply is compatible with demand; and possible adjustments.

Within a company, popular education may be concerned with serious safety problems. In a public housing project, the starting point may be the rent charged. In a neighbourhood, it could be installing a traffic light in front of the school. When dealing with unemployed, unqualified young people, the point could be income earned in a workshop program.

The problems that people have are usually experienced at the individual level. One feature of popular education is the implementation of a collective response, involving the bringing together of people experiencing the same problems.

d) The action taken by popular education movements is not of course confined to catching the eye, even if progress is made when instant solidarity is created among individuals who do not automatically think in collective terms.

In some cases, over-concentration on the "appeal" aspect can result in a corporatist type of action. The challenge here is to respect the ethical principles underlying community education. It is also possible to become involved in actions of solidarity for the benefit of others without seeking an immediate benefit at the personal level. The requirement here is that the individuals involved perceive the society in which they live as a medium in which to define and build a development project, one in which they can play an active role (as citizens of their society). Although a project of this kind exceeds individual abilities, it should have a place for everyone.

This aspect of popular education work is usually linked to more structured education projects, although the contractual aspect is still a factor (adjustments can be made depending on supply)[7].

Popular education strategy entails working to consolidate successful overtures with broader education or solidarity action aimed at a variety of groups; it also entails creating points of contact for the different groups. It is an enormous undertaking.

Within a trade union, fighting social duality and creating solidarity entails interacting with workers to encourage them to broaden the scope of their demands beyond the purely corporatist, a course of action which can lead to even greater exclusion.

It is also true that self-defence is the best defence. In many situations, it is the action of a special interest group that has forced the hand of the majority (if women had not organized into groups, the workers' movement would have had less incentive for supporting their anti-discrimination stand). The best possible development for the fourth world is the assumption of responsibility for its claims by labour movement organizations. This kind of assumption of responsibility requires regular stimulation by the actions of the "fourth world" groups themselves.

Finally, it is absolutely essential that common ground be found. A broad range of experience indicates that this can be done. In Belgium, for example, starting from the particular problem of gas and electricity service to clients in arrears being cut off in the winter, consolidated action by social assistance recipients, social workers and gas and electricity workers has produced results. In Wallonia anti-poverty forums operate on essentially the same principle. Each instance of solidarity represents a highpoint, even if these are only sporadic.

Literacy programs are linked to popular education in that they are designed for the general public, approach a problem collectively rather than individually and are not restricted to purely mechanical learning methods. The very existence of such groups constitutes an impressive challenge to the body social and tears down a whole series of walls between groups which have rarely interacted with one another in the past (e.g. social assistance, continuing education, various government representatives, even representatives of business)*.

Literacy is an Indispensable Piece of a Complex Puzzle or How to Define Literacy within a Development Strategy

In recent years, a number of training programs have been set up for unemployed workers. Changes have occurred in steps, with each new program grafted onto, rather than replacing, the earlier programs. This has produced a high degree of complexity, but this

is not necessarily a problem if the programs are complementary rather than competitive.

It is not unlikely that a similar step-by-step evolution has occurred in other industrialized countries:

1) At a time when unemployment was not a very serious problem, the procedure was to use public job training services for the unemployed to adjust the skills of job-seekers to the job supply. The program's success contributed to spreading the idea that sound training is the key to a good job (or training guarantees a job). The training-job link became a firm tenet of public opinion.

2) The second step occurred at the onset of the recession. The unemployed, convinced that training is an automatic passport to a job, applied in large numbers for the shrinking number of training places available. Vocational training services gradually raised entrance requirements, admitted only the cream of potential workers, and of course maintained a high placement rate for their trainees. All the others, and there were many of them, were not eligible for any training program. This led private popular education associations to set up groups referred to (in the Francophone culture) as "mise à niveau des connaissances" [personal development]. The courses offered included mathematics, mother tongue and introduction to current and social affairs, starting from the everyday concerns and experience of the participating adults. Generally speaking it is this type of movement which provided the impetus for more recent literacy programs.

3) At about the same time there appeared a broad variety of customized training projects. These involved training groups of five to ten individuals specifically for the creation of a small business. The aim was to provide solutions (essentially through personal development) for individuals whose skills level proved inadequate because the job-training link was not sufficiently direct. However it is extremely difficult to create employment in settings which, by definition, have no capital to inject. It must be admitted that the relatively few successes of this type of

venture are all the more remarkable considering the large number of failures.

4) However all such programs require that beneficiaries voluntarily seek training. A large proportion of the most disadvantaged, many of them not even eligible for unemployment benefits, are not interested in education. They are interested in an income sufficient to feed themselves, and would like to get it by doing something more fulfilling than standing in line in a welfare office. For any pedagogical action to be even remotely successful with this group, the education must have the appearance of work rather than training and it must provide an income. This is the hypothesis underlying the many on-the-job training programs set up in Wallonia beginning in 1984. These programs go by a number of names (e.g. vocational training company, integrated development action, intermediate company, production school); project objectives and methods can also vary. It is not our intention to discuss the matter in any detail here. The thing to remember is that the great majority of on-the-job training[9] projects, regardless of their differences, are based on the same pedagogical hypothesis. Although it is not unusual for such projects to include literacy under their umbrellas, they are not by definition literacy projects.

An observation: as time goes on, there are many indications that interest in job integration is steadily growing. This can be observed in different ways:

- Creation of jobs fully financed by the economic activity of various workshops (mainly in the construction industry, occasionally in cleaning).

- More systematic search for a foothold in an economic activity: contacting companies to encourage them to hire young people; negotiating to set up training programs to meet the real needs of companies (e.g. a supermarket chain may agree to cooperate in training butchers, who are subsequently hired in the various branches).

- Study of channels to find areas of potential development suitable to the placement of poorly qualified individuals. For example, everyone knows that many young people are fascinated by things mechanical. This knowledge could lead to a decision to set up a workshop for building and repairing bicycles and motorcycles. However this is an industry in which job development is highly random. Conversely, most forecasts, taking into account the ageing of our populations, with an increase in the incidence of handicaps and the cultural fact that an increasing number of individuals want to remain independent as long as possible, suggest a promising future in wheeled vehicles for the handicapped. There are positions to be occupied, negotiations to be undertaken to link up a workshop and a corporation to facilitate conversion of the bicycle/motorcycle workshop.

- A willingness, at any rate, to help interested individuals break out of the exclusion round by giving them the opportunity to enrol in other training programs where they can earn recognized diplomas or certificates that make them better qualified for the job market.

If this type of initiative is to succeed, it is important to avoid making ghettos of our training programs for the disadvantaged. They must be part of a broader program, if possible at the sub-regional level, with the contacts such consolidation implies. In short, the following points should be stressed:

a) Recognize the need for four distinct types of adult education:

- literacy
- on-the-job training for the highly disadvantaged
- personal development
- customized training (related to specific vocational qualifications or creation of economic activities)

b) Promote joint action by the four above types with the aim of decentralization and maximum effectiveness: avoid duplication, work together to fill gaps, giving inhabitants of rural areas the

benefit of adapted opportunities (one problem could be that literacy groups are organized only in cities).

c) Work on coordinating the four program types to ensure that the individual is protected from running up against a blank wall, and is able to progress (from literacy to personal development; from personal development to customized training). It would be extremely disheartening to see an individual, highly motivated by his or her experience (his investment) in a literacy group, miss a training project opportunity because of the lack of a connecting path (e.g. leading to vocational training).

If an education program of this kind is to succeed, the individual must be encouraged to draw up a plan. The aim is to enable the disadvantaged individual to break out of the ghetto, instead of being condemned to marginal structures for marginal people. There is the possibility of earning a real, recognized and certified qualification, or designing a detailed project and finding the assistance required to make it happen. It is not impossible for the plan to lead to the creation of new community services jointly run by a number of organizations (e.g. an agency to support the creation of economic activity).

Who Will Run this Development Project? Or:
The Relationships between the Community Associations, Public Services and Government

Relationships between community associations, public services and government are sometimes (if not often) difficult. The main sources of tension deserve some consideration. It is not enough to envisage a development strategy: if it is to be implemented, someone has to run it. This is the rationale for defining the roles of the different groups. So many projects grind to a halt because of conflict among the organizations responsible.

The sources of tension

Voluntary community associations (i.e. non-governmental organizations) play a conspicuous role in literacy programs in a number of industrialized countries.

In some countries, the fight against illiteracy only began in earnest when such associations revealed the truth about a problem rarely directly tackled by government or public service. Generally speaking, the scenario is the same everywhere: associations get together and decide to deal with the problem themselves, with few resources. If things go well, after a few years government (national, regional or local) recognizes the seriousness of the problem and, in the ideal situation, passes some kind of literacy legislation, most commonly implemented through grants and assignment of personnel (whose status is usually tenuous) to recognized associations. In some ways, this method means recognizing that community associations can provide the population with useful services that complement traditional public services. The legislation makes hopes run high; and often a whole series of new associations spring up in its wake.

In spite of the progress made, however, the situation of sponsoring associations remains fragile, as if government can never quite go all the way in recognizing the usefulness of the services which they provide.

Even more serious, this is often followed by criticism of associations for non adherence to the rules and, in more serious cases, withdrawal of entire pockets of public monies. The most seriously affected victims are association employees.

The problem has two facets. The first is related to the shortage of public monies, a problem frequently addressed by reducing government expenditure. Activities delegated to non-governmental agencies, especially if they are not supported by a powerful lobby, are an easy target. In the overall scheme of things, the literacy association lobby wields little power.

Government financial problems also have an impact on a variety of public services (e.g. education and vocational training for the unemployed). This is where the second facet of the problem arises: as things get tighter in the schools and vocational training institutions, public services and public service unions tend to view community associations as competitors that siphon off the public

monies to which they are entitled. It is as if, from the moment a problem not dealt with by public services is taken on by publicly funded associations, the public services sit up and take notice. Associations are strongly criticized in the hope of obtaining their funding to upgrade public service operations. A government trying to save money often feels justified by these disputes to make cutbacks in association funding.

There is no doubt that, when problems are revealed, there is always disagreement on responsibility for solving it. Should the means to do so be given to existing associations, or should associations be considered so many cuckoos in the public service nest?

It is extremely difficult to give a definitive answer on the respective roles of associations and public services. The debate will undoubtedly heat up even more in most countries in the coming years, particularly those countries where the government is in serious financial difficulty. For the time being, the best that can be suggested is concerted action at the local level aimed at formulating a kind of social pact that would more clearly define the complementary roles of the various participants and allow for cooperation on new joint projects[10]. The associations have at least two cards to play when local social pacts are being drafted, both of which justify their continued presence. Primarily, associations should be (and are capable of being) lessons in democracy. In addition, they have a legitimate interest in economic development.

The close ties between community associations and democracy

These can be described in a few words, as solid arguments have been put forward elsewhere[11].

Community associations have at least implicit links to democracy.

1) *The association plays a part in the cultural development of individuals.* Associations give individuals real experience in social action: it is through associations that individuals become active citizens, through self-expression and by learning negotiating, planning and action skills. In an association, the individual becomes more than a mere consumer of goods and services; the association gives an active dimension to citizenship. It provides a kind of proof that cultural development, rather than being restricted to a minority, is universal in scope. Although

associations have no monopoly on popular education activities, at the very least the association spirit serves as a facilitator.

2) *Many associations are involved in the fight against life's inequalities.* Countless associations were created by a few individuals as a protest against inequality and injustice. Literacy programs, community after-school classes, neighbourhood associations, creativity centres - all are products of solidarity. The accomplishments of each succeeding decade and each succeeding generation are worthy of admiration and a source of hope for the future.

3) *Furthermore, associations do have links to political democracy.* The concept of political democracy is difficult to define. Strictly speaking, it is the doctrine which states that sovereignty should belong to all citizens as a group. Implementing the principle entails two problems: on the one hand, it is obviously impossible to involve everyone, all the time, in all decision making; on the other hand, the mechanism for temporary delegation of decision-making powers to elected representatives has terrible flaws - how many democratically elected politicians end up behaving like despots from another age! However, caricature is not our aim: representative democracy is, happily, more than that. In spite of the temptations that plague our elected representatives, the press and other pressure groups (in spite of *their* respective imperfections) exercise at least something of a counterbalance: generally speaking, there are limits to what elected representatives can get away with at any given time.

If one takes a closer look at such practices, associations are seen to play a crucial role. They are strategically situated: they demonstrably refute the premise that active citizenship is confined to voting and that citizens should otherwise remain totally passive. They have a mediation function and can transmit concerns regarding elected representatives. The concept of citizenship is at the heart of the close links between the spirit of the association movement and the spirit of popular education.

Associations have a legitimate interest in economic development

In short: development potential in a region does not ensure implementation of that development. The effects of legislation are not automatic.

On the contrary: concrete results depend on local organization of grassroots development opportunities. Potential is never realized unless individuals take the initiative. Taking the initiative is the responsibility of the individual: it is acquired behaviour and improves with practice. It is within associations that individuals learn this behaviour.

How to make an implicit argument explicit

The aim of the preceding paragraphs is to demonstrate that literacy programs, as long as they are not operated as an isolated service, can be a vital aspect of a personal development strategy.

Two premises underlie this strategy:

- Within a region, education programs are like the pieces of a puzzle, which together form the whole picture. Negotiation must be based on the concept of a path. (Is it possible to have integration-oriented training paths for individuals? How can complementarity be achieved?)

- All other things being equal, there is nothing wrong with setting oneself job-integration objectives. However it has been stressed that there is no automatic, unequivocal training-job connection. The objective of a training program should not be merely to meet company requirements. On the contrary, the primary goal is educating the population, i.e. individuals able to understand what goes on around them, to get along in the world, to design projects and negotiate with others to ensure their implementation.

The strategy promoted in this paper is fully consistent with the philosophy of popular education. This in no way implies that community associations should not, as part of the process, seek a more stable position, considering the invaluable services they provide. For the time being, what we are proposing is negotiation

of "local social pacts" on joint management of personal development projects by associations and public services.

If this can be made to work in a region, the success would offer a real solution to those involved in the heated theoretical debate on the duality of society.

Over the past ten years, the dual society concept has been debated long and hard in many countries. Many observers have pointed out the steadily widening gap between the two main divisions of society: the group in which economic activity is strong, workers are protected and income is high; and the marginal group made up of relatively unprotected workers in marginal industries. Obviously a division of this kind is unacceptable. This is a macro-social fact.

Commenting on the various measures taken to solve the problem (e.g. on-the-job training), some of the same observers consider that such measures only strengthen social duality by developing small marginal markets for marginal people.

Although at the macro-social level the dual society concept is helpful in defining a real problem, at the micro-social level it loses its usefulness and becomes an ineffectual facile slogan, an empty bit of sociological jargon. What argument can a social worker use to refute a vague, undefined, categorical accusation of creating a dual society? Social workers who follow traditional methods are criticized; those who try something new are stigmatized. The social worker is thus left with nothing to say, no course of action possible: doomed to fail.

There are a number of responses to this apparent dilemma:

a) The dual society that some people seem to have recently discovered is nothing new. What else is the fourth world but a dual society which has existed since the industrial revolution?

b) In order to fight social duality, interested parties must join forces, create many instances of solidarity, speak out: collective social action is essential. If all these initiatives (including the food banks which operate in France and Belgium in the winter) provide an opportunity for collective action, they make an effective contribution to social change.

c) Underlying the social duality question is a major theoretical and practical tug-of-war: action theory and action as such must accommodate both the macro-social and micro-social viewpoints.

The personal development concept can help attain this goal. As we have seen, not only is it possible to accommodate even the tiniest of operations under the development strategy umbrella, the internal reasoning underlying most new social assistance practices is strikingly similar to the principles underlying the concept of personal economic development:

- mobilize local resources
- meet local needs
- always keeping in mind the channel concept, i.e. economic complementarity with other local activities

For the moment, all of this is only implicit. What is at stake is making it explicit: if we can define an overall strategy that can accommodate even the smallest operations, we will have the potential for mobilizing under the flag of that strategy a far larger number of participants than are currently involved[12].

Notes

1. See the works of Alaluf, Matéo et al. (Institut de sociologie de l'Université libre de Bruxelles) or those published by the Institut supérieur du travail de l'Université de Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium (Marvoy, Christian; Charlier, Jean-Emile et al.)

2. Delors, Jacques. 1987. Interview in the weekly *Pourquoi pas?*. Brussels, 11 June.

3. Adapted from Johada, Marie; Lazarsfeld, Paul and Zeisel, Hans. [1933]. *Mariental, the sociography of an unemployed community*. London: Tavistock Publications, reissued 1972.

4. See also the journal *Critique régionale, cahiers de sociologie et d'économie régionale*, 1983, No. 9 (Institut de sociologie, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles);
Alaluf, Matéo and Vanheerswynghels, Adinda. 1988. *Adéquation enseignement - marché de l'emploi*. Brussels: Fondation Roi Baudouin.

5. Cf. Georis, Pierre and Poelman, Myriam. 1988. *Jeunes et exclusion*. Brussels: Fondation Roi Baudouin.

6. Cf. Meirieu, Philippe. 1984. *Itinéraire des pédagogies de groupe*. Lyon: Chroniques sociales. (2 vols, but see esp. vol. 1, pp. 139-188)

7. In Belgium this is the case for training programs given by the Institut supérieur de culture ouvrière in both French and German: ISCO, rue de la Loi 103, 1040 Brussels.

8. Cantinaux, Roger; Creutz, Emile; Georis, Pierre and Liénard, Georges. 1989. *Exclus et non exclus*. Records of the Colloque du Conseil supérieur de l'éducation populaire, Liège, 1 December. Liège: Ministère de la Communauté française.

9. Cf. Georis, Pierre. 1986. *Les Entreprises d'apprentissage professionnel*. Brussels: Fondation Roi Baudouin.
Les Entreprises d'apprentissage professionnel may be contacted at EAP-Consultance, rue Bélliard 23A, 1040 Brussels.
Les Actions intégrées de développement may be contacted at AID, rue de la Loi 103, 1040 Brussels.

10. The EC is working in this vein to define the projects it supports under the umbrella of its 3rd anti-poverty programme (Poverty 3).

11. Fondation Marcel Hicter. 1987. *Des associations*. Brussels: PAC/Vie ouvrière.

12. Cf. Georis, Pierre. 1988. *Namur lutte contre la pauvreté. De l'aide sociale à la pratique économique*. Charleroi: Editions alternatives wallonnes.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS: A LOCAL APPROACH TO ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Blair Denwette
Maria Walker
Lynn Tett
WABET, Dundee, U.K.

Background to the Project

In the last decade public attention in Great Britain has increasingly focused on the many problems associated with life in our cities, with the issues of urban decline and how to reverse it high on the agenda. In 1988 the Government produced a White Paper, *New Life for Urban Scotland*, which examined these difficult issues and how to tackle them, setting out ten indices by which to identify deprived areas. Whitfield, the site of the project, meets all these indices and is a typical example of the multiple deprivation described in the White Paper.

Whitfield is an extensive housing estate on the northern edge of the Scottish east coast city of Dundee, almost entirely composed of local authority housing owned by Dundee District Council. It has developed a range of severe problems over recent years because of some very poor housing stock (particularly in the deck-access blocks of the Skarne area), a considerable transient population, a lack of jobs locally, the highest level of unemployment in Dundee, and a high rate of dependence on income support and housing benefit. The population has declined and the number of vacant houses has increased dramatically. The whole estate, in fact, has a very poor image.

There are no major industrial or commercial employers located within Whitfield and male unemployment, at 40%, is more than double the rate for the rest of the city. One in six people has been continuously unemployed for more than five years, and those in work are mainly on low incomes. There is a high incidence of poverty, with 73% of the tenants in receipt of housing benefit and an increasing number of single-parent families.

The estate was designed as a pedestrian zone, with vehicles restricted to the main road which circles the periphery of the estate, and to the car parks at entrances to residential blocks. Footpaths criss-cross the large areas of open space separating residential areas from shopping and other facilities: in practice, however, as a result of the distances involved (up to two miles) and poor street lighting at night, the footpaths are not well used. The shopping centre itself is inadequate and run-down, and the pub which is situated there is a constant source of conflict. A number of voluntary groups are active in the area but there is insufficient provision for young people, and the community facilities which do exist at Whitfield High School are little used in the evening because of its isolated location.

The Whitfield Partnership

As a result of Government White Paper, the Whitfield Partnership was set up in June 1988 'to develop and coordinate the implementation of a strategy for the long-term regeneration of Whitfield, in line with the Government's objectives for urban regeneration'. The Partnership comprises representatives of central and local government, national housing, economic and industrial agencies, together with representatives of the local community. It proposes a broad-based strategy rather than a detailed blueprint for the regeneration of Whitfield, and its aim has been to build on the strengths of the area and on the efforts already made to improve it.

Housing and environmental change are an essential part of the regeneration of Whitfield but they cannot progress in isolation: improvements in employment and training and in community facilities are essential features of long-term opportunities in the area. A coordinated and sustained investment programme will be required over the next five to ten years if regeneration is to have lasting success. Needless to say, the challenge this presents is one of considerable magnitude, and not the least part of the task is to motivate the residents of the area behind the strategy. It is here that Adult Basic Education can play a significant role in the regeneration of Whitfield.

Adult Basic Education

If, nationally, one third of the adult population of Great Britain has basic education needs, an area of multiple deprivation like Whitfield, with a population of between 10,000 and 12,000, may be expected to have a considerable need for ABE. In practice, however, most of the areas of social priority in Scotland tend to be under-represented in terms of ABE provision. In 1986, Tayside's Adult Basic Education Unit had virtually no presence in what is the largest deprived area in the Region, and there had been no group provision of ABE offered there for more than three years, one of the major reasons being that there was no demand to justify such a group. It was not that ABE was not available to people in Whitfield, but response to ABE advertising on TV and in the newspapers had never been successful. The situation was, therefore, at odds with statistical expectations.

Traditional ABE practice in Scotland usually involves a two-hour-per-week face-to-face contact with the adult student. The mode of delivery is 1:1, with a volunteer providing the tutoring skills. Depending on funding, there will be some professional support, but this varies greatly across Scotland. Volunteers are used as *cheap* educational labour, but this is a fallacy, as 1:1 tutoring needs a high level of support and training. Similarly, it assumes the student is highly motivated and confident, to at least the degree of *admitting* there is a *problem*, and undertaking a great deal of self-study in his or her free time.

In 1986 a ABE worker based at the Continuing Education Unit in Mitchell Street, Dundee, was given the task of trying to build up a responsive ABE provision in the Whitfield area. The idea was to work towards a strategy that would allow the unit to work with as many people as possible. An explanation of alternative modes of delivery was necessary, not only as an attempt to respond to Whitfield but in the hope of informing a rationalisation of the total provision within Tayside.

The aims of the project were specified as follows:

- to raise the profile of ABE in Whitfield;
- to make ABE more accessible to Whitfield residents;
- to establish local referral points to obviate the need for direct contact with the Mitchell Street base in the process.

A traditional ABE group was not seen as the way forward. It seemed better to work at making the Whitfield area as self-sustaining as possible by using local volunteers and local agencies and by tapping into education already provided. The method used was to talk to professionals and volunteers in the many local agencies, rather than to set up yet another agency. Each of these visits had much the same structure: the intention was to give information about the ABE unit, to find out about the work of the agency, and to emphasize the ABE role of the service which could be useful to the agency and its clients. The hope was to put ABE in the minds of contacts. Reliable and appropriate reaction to needs was seen as a priority and ABE input was not to be restricted only to the unit: it was hoped that the networking process would allow the unit to act in a mediating role.

This initiative had mixed success. Contacts with local people helped to confirm ABE needs and it is probable that these needs would not otherwise have been expressed. To fulfil demand, groups were set up and this extra time commitment took away from the time that was intended for networking. At the outset, professional workers had low opinions of local commitment and these appeared to have been borne out in the initiative over that year. The evidence, however, was not nearly conclusive. While having a worker in situ may have removed some barriers to involvement, commitment and motivation, many others seemed to have been created by workers and agencies themselves.

The ABE response was also heavily marred by unnecessary barriers. Access to local referral points was subject to the problems above and there was pressure to base provision in under-used centres. Many of the recruited volunteers doing their training at the Mitchell Street Centre actually became volunteers there, rather than in Whitfield. In writing his conclusion to the initiative, the worker at the time made some very important observations:

> Given the size and nature of Whitfield's problems, it is easy to conclude that much more time should be spent in ABE work. While ABE groupwork has a limited response, it is better than nothing at all. However, given the apparent reluctance of local residents, the patterns of groupwork would certainly need to be further modified in order to work. It seems that agencies such as ours need to move further towards the community, rather than to expect the community to come to us. In

> practice this would mean that we should adapt our work to realities and actual patterns of interest in the area, perhaps by offering groups in places where people already meet, perhaps by integrating what we offer with what people already do, or with what they would like to do. Group provision cannot be the whole answer, because many barriers, including lack of confidence, lack of social skill or lack of hope or knowledge would mean that individuals would not readily come to an ABE group or any other type of group in Whitfield. Other means of access are needed.

Traditional methods did not work in Whitfield because of the factors already mentioned - low motivation, because of the lack of expectation that education is worthwhile; lack of self-confidence; inadequate social and family support; and economic instability. It was clear that an entirely new approach was needed, and when, in October 1988, the Minister for Education in the Scottish Office, Mr. Michael Forsyth, announced that there would be money totalling £30,000 per annum to set up an Open Learning Centre in Scotland for Adult Basic Education, the opportunity to initiate an innovative project was very tempting to Tayside Regional Council's Continuing Education Unit.

The timetable for submission was short, and within a week, Tayside Community Education Service's staff formulated a proposal for an outreach adult basic education base which would be locally accessible, friendly and without stigma. They wished the project to be a collaborative venture between the Region, other voluntary bodies and the local people.

Once the idea was formed, voluntary bodies already working with the Unit were asked to become part of the Trust which submitted the proposals. These voluntary bodies were:

- Dundee Resource Centre for the Unemployed;
- The Aberlour Trust;
- Tayside Community Enterprise Support Team;
- and various community organisation representatives.

The Whitfield Adult Basic Education Trust was formed by these interested voluntary bodies in Whitfield and, in essence, aimed to set up a project which was a voluntary organisation through and through - directors, volunteers and students - all contributing to the new approach to ABE. The area covered by the Project's remit included

not only Whitfield itself, but also the adjacent housing schemes of Fintry and Mid-Craigie. In formulating the aims of the Whitfield Adult Basic Education Project, the experiences of the previous initiative in 1986 were important. Equally important was the feeling in ABE circles in Scotland that the traditional methods only work in a limited number of cases. The aims of the Project were as follows:

a) *Adult Basic Education*
Generally this was to involve short course work over one to two days per week, rather than the traditional two hour per week model. The main emphasis would be on group work, looking at particular skills, e.g., spelling and numeracy in the workplace. It was also proposed that there would be issue-based work. The Trust hoped to target local families and the unemployed, as well as local groups. Because of the interest shown by one of the founder members, the Aberlour Trust, particular emphasis was to be given to family work, probably in the evenings, to try to break the cycle of illiteracy.

b) *Adult educational guidance*
The Trust proposed a facility for educational guidance with regard to opportunities within Tayside. Guidance regarding adult education and employment opportunities would also be available as the Trust made contact with local providers.

c) *Enterprise education*
Particular attention would be given to individual enterprise. This would involve encouraging abilities and motivation through confidence-building and using this to develop competence. It was not seen that the Trust would be in competition with other enterprise bodies: rather, it would try to develop skills within the individual which would make enterprise work possible.

d) *Job seeking*
The Trust hoped to encourage group tuition for the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC) Modules in relevant subjects. There would also be opportunities for Computer-assisted Learning and Basic Computer Literacy. It was hoped to encourage general confidence- building through group work and communications to lead to better job-seeking skills.

The project was submitted for Scottish Office approval and confirmation of a grant of £30,000 per annum was the signal for the work to begin in earnest. Suitable premises had to be found for the Project. The choice facing the Trust comprised: a disused police station; a maisonette with ground-floor entry; and a vacant shop previously used as a launderette. The idea of a shop as a base appealed - it would seem more *business-like* than the usual family centre type of premises. Thus, although it was more expensive than the other alternatives, the shop was thought by all concerned to be the best option. Taking on such a project meant that the Trust had to adopt a more suitable legal status.

WABET had been planned as a Trust, with a constitution not unlike those of many other voluntary organisations, and with representatives from Tayside Regional Council, as well as a membership of local people. When it was decided to lease a shop, however, the initial ideas had to change.

Leasing the shop meant undertaking a contract of 20 years with the property owners, which was out of the question, given the three-year funding of the Project. After correspondence with the property owners, however, a lease of four years was agreed, provided they were dealing with a limited company. Other factors regarding tax and general liability were also prompting the original members to seek limited company status, and the Trust's solicitor was instructed accordingly. This inevitably slowed the pace of work, as the Trust had to wait for the various administrative and legal requirements to be completed.

Meanwhile local consultation began. The Team were very anxious to include local people in both the management and the actual life of the Project. It is true to say that quite extensive opposition was encountered in the beginning, because the Project had obtained funding without any real consultation with the local people. Local activists and Whitfield residents were, not surprisingly, very cynical about yet another professional organisation "parachuting" into the area. There were already very many voluntary organisations, community groups, Urban Aid projects, and government initiatives in Whitfield. The early days of WABET Ltd. also coincided with the early days of the Central Government-funded Whitfield Partnership.

Limited local consultation *had* taken place and this caused many problems in the early weeks. Some local activists felt that the

Project should not be supported, while others thought that, though the way the Project had to be submitted meant little consultation had been possible, now that it had some to Whitfield, it should be given full support. When the situation was explained, however, most local community groups were happy that the Project was coming to Whitfield. A long series of public consultations began, culminating in April, 1989, when the Limited Company was formed, and, after the first few months, the Directors of WABET Ltd. had whole-hearted support from local people, politicians and officials.

As the builders moved in to the former launderette, the Team were determined that it should be a bright attractive place, with no trappings reminiscent of office or school. Even the chairs were re-covered easy chairs, rather than normal office furniture. About this time, it was learned that the Training Agency also intended to sponsor the Learning Shop and a grant of £20,000 was received to purchase new technology equipment. This equipment proved to be one of the best buys, as the computers and word processors attracted many people into the shop who might never otherwise have crossed its threshold.

People were prepared to admit that they were computer illiterate and thereby to do something about their literacy, which would never have happened had that equipment not been available. Certainly a few mistakes were made in the purchase of equipment but nothing too serious. Reflecting on that time, the Directors and workers were extremely busy and tasks had to be allocated and fulfilled very quickly. In many ways, it was a time of team building among these people and the strong bond forged between Directors and Project Coordinator has never yet been broken - though often tested!

Perhaps a few words are necessary about the Directors. At the time of writing there are eight Directors of the Company, two from the local authority, one from an Urban Aid Community Enterprise Support Team, one from the Aberlour Trust and four members of the Whitfield community.

The Project Coordinator's Experience

This section relates the personal experience of Blair Denwette, the Project Co-ordinator, in setting up and developing the Project. To convey the essential element of direct experience, it has been deliberately kept in the first person.

As has been stated earlier, ABE involvement with the peripheral areas of Dundee has never been entirely successful.

Despite some initial reservations on being asked to co-ordinate this Project, I found the prospect both exciting and challenging, because it would allow me to approach ABE from a local base in a developmental way.

Initial contacts were made with local professionals from Tayside's Community Education Service to:

- advise them of what was envisaged, and
- identify a local network of professional organisations and local community-managed projects.

It was during this period that I became aware that communication and collaboration with the local community - both activists and professionals - was not only desirable but essential. The task, therefore, was to involve local people from the outset or within a short period of time.

Our two principal objectives in this preliminary period were:

1. to establish a high profile and a working provision in the area, and
2. to negotiate for premises in the area.

Networking model

My approach to objective (1) involved the recruitment of local and other interested volunteers (tutors and students already committed to ABE) to discuss how best to make these initial contacts. Following detailed discussion among ourselves, we decided on a networking model. In his paper *Adult Education and Community Development - A Network Approach*, Tom Lovett talks of Adult Education as a resource for Community Development and describes a project set up in Liverpool as a network model (see Appendix 1). This approach

required considerable training and legwork: but as a method of obtaining and giving information it was to prove very successful.

Initial contacts were made to:

- identify what information we should be giving at this stage;
- establish possible links/areas of collaboration with local organisations;
- identify any immediate provision requirements; and
- obtain information on access to clients/users of the local agencies and services.

Once a clear method of addressing the above had been established within the networking group, a strategy was devised to raise the confidence of group members and train the volunteers in networking.

This training involved responding to the expressed needs of the group, as well as participation in direct face-to-face contact with agencies/organisations in the community. In my capacity as Co-ordinator, and accompanied by the college student on placement, I visited high-priority agencies, giving and receiving the information required. This information was then discussed and appropriately recorded by the group as a whole, prior to any further visits. The initial pair then split up and took responsibility for involving another two group members, thus developing a pyramid structure. This style of development was extended until all group members were actively involved in the exercise.

As a method of recording, the group devised a flow chart that could be easily followed and would display visually the current stage of contact.

It was during this visiting period that many local educational needs emerged which required immediate response; these ranged from people who wanted to brush up on spelling, to those who weren't sure what they wanted but knew it involved study skills. By utilising the expertise of our tutors, and acting on the positive response from local agencies to our requests for space/accommodation and creche provision, we were able to respond to the community demands identified at the outset of the exercise.

It should be noted at this stage that these requests came not only from existing groups, but also from individuals within the community at large.

The use of the networking approach should not be seen as a one-off exercise: we have found that there is a continuing need to affirm and reaffirm our community involvement.

Negotiation for premises

In addition to the development of ABE, the Company, in consultation with the local community, had to negotiate for suitable premises and, as has already been mentioned, settled on a shop as the best option for our purposes. Architectural guidance was sought, and plans were submitted to the local authority, so that the very extensive refurbishment could commence. Our initial idea was that a shop front would provide an easy means of access to informal, locally-based education and guidance.

Many major headaches were encountered during these early stages of the Company's existence. On reflection, however, the constant to-ing and fro-ing to meet with builders, architects, etc. allowed us to get to know local residents and shopkeepers.

The official opening of *The Learning Shop* was held at the beginning of September 1989.

Having a base to work from had many advantages: for example, people could drop in for education as they would drop in to a newsagent for a newspaper, and it provided a constant source of learning opportunities in the heart of the community.

There were, however, disadvantages, in that much of the proactive outreach work had to be curtailed to accommodate staffing and security needs and the day-to-day running of the Learning Shop.

At this stage the staff consisted of the Project Co-ordinator, one full-time and one part-time adult education worker, one part-time clerical support worker, a small number of part-time paid group tutors and volunteers, and by December 1989, further funding had been obtained to appoint another full-time project worker (ABE).

Publicity

The provision and take-up of provision over the months prior to the opening of the Shop had raised our awareness of how we should publicise the work and development of the organisation. Posters and leaflets made little - often no - impact, in that what we were offering would only ever be identified through basic educational

needs: e.g. spelling courses, budgeting courses, etc. Local newspaper adverts likewise brought no response.

The lessons learned from this exercise directed us into a dialogical approach to addressing the effects of illiteracy and innumeracy; e.g. a parent unable to help a child with homework, or someone unable to claim benefit because inability to read about, or claim for, the benefits available.

Our main method of publicity has, therefore, been by word of mouth: this has been particularly effective in promoting new technology as a tool for developing and addressing ABE needs.

Constant dialogue with community groups and individuals has also directed us into issue-based learning, incorporating ABE. Issues have ranged from someone requiring help to write a letter regarding a dampness problem, to a group raising community awareness of the culture and history of graffiti. Taking on this type of crisis or issue is a strong motivator for learning.

Drop-in

As I have already said, from a professional point of view the advantages of having the shop as a base are many - people can drop in for education as they would drop in to a newsagent for a newspaper, and it can provide a constant source of learning opportunities in the heart of Whitfield. Before this happy state could be achieved, however, the team needed to work hard, through the networking process, to raise local awareness of the presence of the Learning Shop and the services it could offer the community.

The Project offers a flexible educational provision which is determined by individual learning needs and styles. These individual styles range from a person seeking individual tutoring on a week-by-week basis, to someone utilising the premises for self-directed study work with limited tutor support. In the Appendices to this Chapter are some accounts of individual experiences of the Learning Shop's flexible provision system.

Local co-investigation

The adoption of the networking model opened dialogue with all community organisations and user groups. We needed to develop a strategy to reach those sections of the community which had not

been reached through the community organisations. A group of users and workers was formed to further develop a strategy to reach out into the community.

The Co-investigating Group's aims might be summarised as:

- to contact those local people for whom schooling has been an unsuccessful and uninviting experience;

- to enable those people to identify the issues that confront them;

- to assist people to build relevant educational and action programmes, in the light of the issues identified; and

- to help people reflect on their new knowledge and/or action in order to address the issues more creatively or more critically.

These general aims may be said to be a methodological description of the educational process developed by Paulo Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

We carried out a co-investigation of the area, utilising local volunteers and technology - a video camera, audio equipment and stills cameras. We approached this task in four stages:

1. Recruitment of volunteers from among individuals already using the service, as well as others interested in this particular approach.

2. Training in the technological aspects of the equipment, as well as how the material produced could be redirected to the community.

3. Discussion of themes and issues identified through audio or visual material.

4. Re-presentation of the material and of themes and issues to the community.

One project undertaken by part of the Co-investigation Group was to photograph local everyday life. The photographers' only remit was

that they should identify three key points for each photograph taken, which were:

- What am I taking?
- Why I am taking it?
- Who am I taking it for?

These photographs were then processed, developed and presented to the group as a whole for discussion and analysis of main themes or issues. This method of identification of issues brought about an open and honest dialogue between group members, which raised fundamental questions of moral judgement, discrimination and prejudice, and eventually resulted in greater group solidarity and strength.

One of the issues identified by the group was that, during the summer months, vast numbers of the local population virtually disappeared for the *berry picking*. The agricultural land around Dundee is a famous soft fruit-growing area, and many local people take an casual work picking the fruit in the summer months. The group decided to do a photographic study of this exodus, as well as recording the thoughts, feelings, and difficulties surrounding basic skills in number and written communication; for example, how do I know if I'm being cheated, if I can't understand the difference between kilos and pounds?

On completion of the practical tasks of visiting the berry fields and having the photographs processed and developed, an exhibition was mounted in the Learning Shop window for public viewing and comment. This exercise, along with others of a similar nature, has encouraged many people to address their specific needs in basic skills development.

Mothers' Planning Group

Here is the experience of a tutor using the co-investigation approach with a group:

> The *Mothers' Planning Group* are a group of 13 women who meet every fortnight. They initially met informally, and through discussions identified issues concerning their lives.
> In the Co-investigation style of work, once we identify the community's issues, we re-direct them to the people. The issues we

identified were around children, and the need for a Soft Play Room. It was realised that this was a necessity, particularly for the mothers of children with special needs, who seem to be more isolated.

The first part of the co-investigation was concerned with what we call *secondary information*, which is a research period consisting in the gathering of knowledge about the identified issue. In this way, other similar projects were contacted and visited, including Rainbow House in Mid-Craigie and ALP Edinburgh.

Subsequently a survey was drawn up and people went out into the streets to discuss the issue with the community and gather information. At the same time some questions aimed at parents of children with special needs were sent to several schools, which agreed to send copies to children's parents.

The group regularly discussed the information gathered, and set up a campaign for a Soft Toy Room, drawing posters and inviting new mothers to join the group.

Other issues have been identified, such as health, vandalism, dog fouling, and teenagers' and pensioners' integration into the neighbourhood.

A photo-investigation called *No Place To Go* is currently expanding on one of the identified issues - the lack of facilities in the area.

As the group is progressing in their work, letters are being sent; e.g. to shopkeepers, the local clinic and nursery. New skills are required such as writing letters, spelling and even budgeting for the group's campaign. New ABE courses are being set up in order to provide for such needs.

In this way the co-investigation has struck a balance between action and reflection, and the educational process has been established around issues concerning the community, at the same time as giving its members self-confidence and skills, such as listening and working in groups.

Raising professional awareness

Much of the work of the Project has concentrated on breaking down the stigma and cycle of illiteracy by addressing the effects of inability to read, write and count. This has involved raising not only the community's awareness, but also that of professionals coming to work in the area: for example, social workers, police and the formal education sector. To this end, a seminar was organised to which all professionals from the area were invited. We were greatly en-

couraged by the number of participants, and also by the level of debate and interest in future collaborative work.

We are currently two years into the Project and now feel that we have an identity with, and within, the local community. Much has been achieved through experimentation. To a great extent, this process is still being worked through, with new ideas emanating from a variety of sources within and without the community. It is essential that we continually assess our work through evaluation and reflection.

In conclusion, I would hope that, by using this process and by continuing to listen to the community, we can create a worthwhile partnership to develop an educational curriculum that is for the community, in the community and, most importantly, developed by the community. This ultimate goal will continue to challenge, inform and direct the work of the Project in the future.

Styles and Methods of Provision

Tutor training

The thinking from the outset of WABET's community involvement has been directed towards an open-ended educational curriculum which would be in the community, for the community and developed by the community. This philosophy has been realised only to a limited extent. A major difficulty has centred around the mystique of education and the skills required to tutor an adult in basic education. When this is coupled with low confidence and self-esteem it has, in many cases, prevented local people from offering their help.

Tutors have, therefore, been recruited from other, more affluent areas of Dundee, a factor which may, unfortunately, create the impression that education can only be facilitated by outsiders.

There are, however, a number of local people who, by addressing their own learning needs, have become confident of their own ability and are taking more responsibility in assisting other learners. For those individuals who have reached this stage, this is a major step, and for the Project workers it has required considerable effort in building trust and developing relationships.

Training for WABET's tutors has been developed in collaboration with Tayside Region's Continuing Education Unit. This has a set eight-session *Induction Programme* looking at attitudes, awareness and skills requirements, such as spelling and early reading.

This induction should equip the volunteer with a base for beginning to work with a student. However, the *real* training starts when a tutor identifies the specific needs of the student/learner. The Project can then respond to these specific training needs.

As the Project has moved away from traditional ABE approaches, it has had to develop an additional groupwork training course for tutors involved in this area. The training is run over six sessions, and covers subjects from group dynamics to consideration of how literacy and numeracy - as related to issues such as budgeting or helping children with homework - can be facilitated through the groupwork process. It is hoped that the success of this training so far will allow greater flexibility in what is already on offer in the Learning Shop.

ABE seeks to identify individual skills and strengths and to build on them. A *holistic* or whole-person approach ensures that literacy and numeracy are only a part of the whole picture. Very often the illiterate person will be sigmatised and marginalised, and will feel he/she has failed and been rejected by society. The Project, through collaborative work in the community, has striven to dispel these myths.

As has already been discussed in the methodology section, the Learning Shop offers a wide range of opportunities which can broadly be described as computer-assisted learning, enterprise education, family education, and adult basic education. Educational guidance is also available, both at the Learning Shop on a drop-in basis and at the end of courses, so that students have the opportunity to think about where they should go next. Because individuals vary in their learning styles, a range of degrees of participation is offered, including one-to-one, group work, self-direction and immediate help with specific problems.

The *drop-in* provision available in the shop is greatly assisted by having the tutor rota system, where a tutor will spend, for example, one regular morning or afternoon per week in the Learning Shop. As well as being *on duty* to deal with immediate requests, the trained volunteers are encouraged to utilise this time and space for personal educational development. The rota system also allows an opportunity

for support and supervision and, furthermore, can assist in identifying volunteers' specific training needs (see A Volunteer's Perspective - Appendix 2).

Types of provision offered

In terms of computer-assisted learning, the shop offers a variety of opportunities using the computers as an attraction and as a tool. As well as using computers in one-to-one contacts with students, the shop offers a *Dabblers* group to satisfy casual interest, two groups covering basic computer literacy, and a more advanced group for those who wish to move on from the basic provision. Students can also book time on the computer for self-directed learning. Computers have been used to assist in learning keyboard skills; basic programming; basic wordprocessing skills; use of technology to assist the search for work (CV's, letters of application); pursuit of training opportunities by using the database of learning opportunities contained in *Training Access Points*; and acquiring a basic grounding before going on to study the subject at a higher level in a Further Education College (see An Ex-Student's Perspective - Appendix 3).

There is a steady demand for Enterprise Education relating to the ever-changing face of Whitfield. Since their arrival in the area, the Whitfield Partnership, implementing their social strategy plans, have sought to work with the local community in areas of general concern. This, in turn, has generated demands from individuals who need to write letters or fill in forms, and from treasurers of local committees who require basic book-keeping skills. Provision for groups has been in terms of communication skills courses, which have centred around areas of written and verbal skills as well as written and verbal presentation, and seeking and planning information. These courses have also allowed individual group members to pursue for any further ABE provision they may require.

The establishment of links with other agencies in the area has enabled the Learning Shop to identify specific issues for group work, not always immediately associated with basic education. The demand for book-keeping and secretarial skills from members of local committees has already been mentioned. There were also a number of individual requests to address study skills. With guidance from the Continuing Education Unit, SCOTVEC Modules were developed and are currently being delivered in *Options and Choices*, and *Com-*

munications II. Ways of raising the community's involvement with local schools' adult education provision are also being sought.

Provision is made in several other locations as well as the Learning Shop. St. Matthew's Family Centre, which can provide a creche, hosts the book-keeping group, a return to study group, and a creative writers' group. A fathers' group, men who are bringing up their children alone, meet in the Whitfield Family Centre where, by sharing their experiences, fears, etc., through the group, they are beginning to address what *education* can do for them personally and how this can happen. A mothers' planning group meets in Fintry Church. The group has identified a variety of community issues concerning members' lives, including health, vandalism, integration of teenagers and pensioners, and the lack of facilities in the area, and are acquiring the skills which will help them tackle these issues.

A group have been meting in Mid-Craigie to begin to investigate the needs of the community there at grass-roots level, but this is a new area which has so far been rather unresponsive, and perhaps a different strategy will be needed.

Family education concentrates on helping parents with the issues they identify, which can range from helping with children's education using computers, to fighting for better facilities in the area for children. Although Open University packs are available, the uptake has been low and their use in groupwork has been limited.

A very interesting development has been the *co-investigation* projects, which have used Freirian methodology to help local people identify and investigate the issues which are important to them. Both the fathers' group and the mothers' planning group began life in this way, and there is also a Whitfield History Project group which began in May 1990 and is continuing. One very interesting co-investigation project was *The Berry Season*. The recordings and photographs taken were made into an album which could be used for de-codification sessions. A similar project concentrated on the graffiti with which the area is plagued, and produced an album of photographs of various graffiti which were discussed with the community.

Problems

A number of factors which work against consistent student/tutor meetings, including difficulty in contacting students by telephone, and social, economic and personal factors which may inhibit the take-up of provision after the first contact with staff were identified, and a new referral system was introduced in August 1990. This procedure utilises the rota of experienced volunteers who can attend immediately to interested individuals and thus work to achieve a first positive feedback. Working within a social strategy area with serious financial problems and inadequate childcare provision, in addition to problems of low expectations, has major implications for educationalists. Much of the team's work and pro-activity has therefore involved looking at ways of providing childcare facilities and alleviating financial restrictions through collaborative work with other local organisations.

It became apparent early in the Project that there could be a danger of providing a drop-in social environment. This, no doubt, had a lot to do with the shop's informal, relaxed and open atmosphere and approaches to adult education. For this reason a number of ground rules had to be set for project users, to achieve a balance between education and socialisation.

All the provision made by WABET has come about as a result of a real dialogue between the workers and the local community about their issues. This is why it has succeeded.

Main Lessons Learned from the Project

What has been learned from the Project which will enable WABET to provide more appropriate basic education for its students and help funding bodies to understand what they can expect?

The first lesson is the time it takes to get anything off the ground, particularly in areas of deprivation. Funding bodies must not expect quick results from a project such as this which, of its very nature, is a long-term undertaking. Time is necessary to gain the trust of the local community, who are naturally suspicious of professionals. The latter are often perceived by locals as *do-gooders* who will shortly leave the area again without having made any

impact, a perception for which the professionals themselves are frequently to blame.

Arising from this point is the further lesson that, if you listen to and work with the community, a worthwhile partnership can be created that will, to quote Blair Denwette, result in: "an educational curriculum that is for the community, in the community and developed by the community."

Listening to the community, building up networks and negotiating a curriculum takes resources, especially staff time, and money. Another lesson learned from Project is that adequate funding is necessary, both for the staffing of the shop and the continuation of the vital networking and outreach activities. There is an unfortunate tendency in official circles to expect first class results on the cheap, but genuine and lasting achievements in this field are only possible if adequate funding is available. People will not drop into a shop to *buy* education. They need to know what is on offer, and the mechanisms to disseminate the information required must be there, and must be paid for.

In terms of publicity, the Project has clearly illustrated that advertising courses is a totally ineffective strategy, whereas talking to key activists, local groups, local leaders and key professionals, can be effective. Posters and leaflets have little immediate effect, but word-of-mouth, through satisfied students, tutors and volunteers, has proved to be the most effective way of involving local people.

An important lesson in terms of the curriculum is that in many social priority areas, basic education must be approached obliquely. Very few people are willing to seek help with basic literacy skills, but many are attracted by the opportunity to learn basic technological skills such as word processing. The objective in both cases is the same - to give people the opportunity to improve their basic communication skills -but the means must be attractive to the users of the service. Flexibility and a willingness to adapt ABE practice to suit changing perceptions of educational need are essential; otherwise, of course, the service will not be used.

The image of the Project is crucial, both in terms of the availability of new technology and in terms of its purpose. WABET was clear that it had an educational purpose, and so all students worked to achieve negotiated learning outcomes, covering a short time period, and which were re-negotiated as necessary. This meant

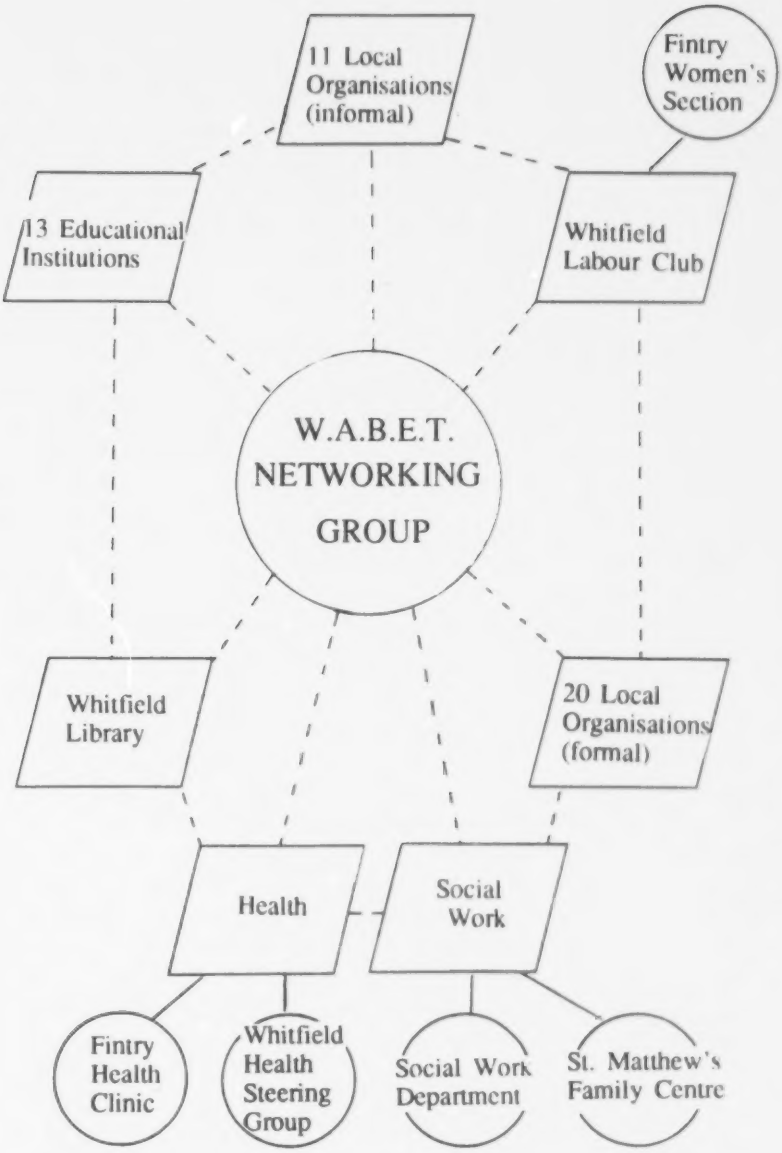
that no student was dropping into the shop just because it provided a warm, comfortable environment.

Since the Project is the only one of its kind in Scotland, it has created a high degree of interest from organisations throughout the country. There were times when visits from interested parties seemed almost to take over from the actual work of the Learning Shop. The interest shown, and the questions raised with regard to our styles and methods of work have allowed us to challenge and assess our work and philosophy continually.

In terms of learning opportunities, WABET has provided a bridge between informal and formal learning opportunities, by enabling students to take the first step back to learning, but then offering opportunities for them to move on. It should not be forgotten that, to adults unaccustomed to participation in this field, the perceived image of further education and the effort involved in pursuing a course of study can be as intimidating as they are attractive. Educational guidance was played a crucial role in enabling people who have taken their first step back into education to clarify what they want to do and where they could move on to. The provision of guidance facilities in the Learning Shop and to the student groups has been a vital method of ensuring that individuals are informed about the choices and options open to them.

A final lesson is the value of the Project in terms of human resource development. We have already spoken of the blurring of the tutor/student distinction and the value to anyone who embarks on a learning programme of the increase in self-confidence. Each person who takes part in such a programme has a multiplier function, in terms of the benefit to that individual's family, the wider community, and the economy as a whole. Since each student is likely to have a direct effect on at least three other people (children, partner, parents, friends), the long-term benefit to the community is immeasurable. Community regeneration of any kind is impossible without the whole-hearted support and participation of the people. Motivate the individual and you will be well on the way to achieving your goal.

APPENDIX 1


11 Local Organisations (informal)
Fintry Women's Section
13 Educational Institutions
Whitfield Labour Club
W.A.B.E.T. NETWORKING GROUP
Whitfield Library
20 Local Organisations (formal)
Health
Social Work
Fintry Health Clinic
Whitfield Health Steering Group
Social Work Department
St. Matthew's Family Centre

APPENDIX 2

A Volunteer's Perspective: Volunteer Tutor Training

My name is Maureen Smith. I am a 39 year old housewife who, discovering for the first time in many years that I had only myself to think about now that my son had left home and my husband was working abroad, had no excuses for not doing the things that I wanted to do.

I had not worked for approximately ten years, most of my working life having been spent in the secretarial field. When I began looking for work I discovered very quickly that I had no experience of modern office machinery; i.e. word processors, computers, fax machines, etc.

I made enquiries into further education and in doing this heard about Voluntary Work for the first time. I telephoned Brian Maddox at Mitchell Street who invited me along for an informal chat. I have to say that I had not even realised there was such a thing as Adult Basic Education. I had heard of the problems that were created through illiteracy via the media, i.e. newspapers and television programmes, but it was not until I sat listening to Brian that I realised just how difficult it was for people who cannot read and write to cope in everyday situations.

Brian gave me some literature to read and also gave me the names of other people who might be able to help me. One of the names he passed on to me was that of Blair Denwette of The Learning Shop at Whitfield. I arranged a meeting with Blair. That was back in December, 1990 and since then I feel that I have learned so much. I applied to do my Tutor Training, but the next course did not start until 15th January, 1991. To my surprise, when I explained how little experience I had, especially in computers and word processors, Blair suggested I spend some time within The Learning Shop, generally helping out where I could. I have to say it was very easy to yes, but the reality of attending The Learning Shop, ignorant of its basic needs, was quite something else. However, on the morning of Monday, 3rd December, 1990 I duly arrived at Whitfield. By the time I left at 5.00 p.m. that night I felt, for the first time in many years, that I had accomplished something. I had been shown round by very kind and helpful staff. Nothing was too much for them. I am one of these people who will always ask questions, and I found that there was always an answer.

I was made to feel very much at home on this my first day; they encouraged me and guided me to the point that I began to realise that I too could perhaps learn a skill that would be beneficial to others in some capacity.

By the end of the first week I had a basic knowledge of computers and word processors. The most important thing for me was the fact that I had been watching and listening to what was going on within the Shop and I was very impressed by the facilities being offered, but even more impressed by the manner in which the staff dealt with the students coming in. Nothing was too much for the staff. Of they themselves could not specifically help, they would not let anyone go empty-handed. They just looked further afield for whatever it was the student was after.

As December was drawing to a close, I was beginning to feel confident in what I was doing and I was looking forward to the official training time in the hope that I too could become a volunteer tutor.

On one occasion when the staff were preparing some work for one of their groups, I asked if I could help and was assisting by doing some photocopying. I was enlarging something and didn't know what it said so obviously I asked. To my surprise it was a greeting in Gaelic. It said *A Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year*. To me it could have been French, German, Arabic - in fact, any foreign language. This was when I realised what it must be like for people who cannot read English. I actually think it would be a very good example for letting people see what it's like not to be able to read.

A few days before the Shop closed for the Christmas break, due to ill health, one of the tutors did not arrive and she had been unable to cancel her appointment with her student. On the student's arrival I was asked if I would like to help. I have to say I was both eager and nervous. However, the student soon put me at my ease and I discovered I was really enjoying myself. I had been listening and watching for a few weeks but it's like everything else - the professionals make it look so easy. I discovered then, and only then, the reason for training.

After the student had left, I asked Audrie Taylor if she would explain something to me. At one point during the session the student had begun to talk to me about herself and I found that this was taking over what we were doing. It was here that I realised I didn't know how to proceed, without hurting the student's feeling.

Audrie said she had been watching me and that I had dealt with it adequately, but as I said above, it was then that I realised that there is more to this than meets the eye.

I would like to finish by saying that I hoped to achieve a level of knowledge that I could pass on to someone else, and that by doing this, hopefully, it would help someone. In trying to achieve this, I have actually gained so much more myself.

I am very grateful for the opportunity Blair has given me, because even if I do not make the grade as a volunteer tutor the past few weeks have not been wasted, as I have really benefited from the experience.

APPENDIX 3

An Ex-Student's Perspective

I was unemployed for 6 months and had no experience in word processing. I was registered at the Whitfield Job Cabin and they referred me to WABET. I attended every Tuesday; then I gained employment and then went during my lunch hour every Wednesday. After about 8 visits to WABET I felt more confident in using the word processor. They were very helpful, taking it one stage at a time, going over things again if I did not understand them.

I feel it is no longer necessary for me to attend as my employer sent me on a full-time word processing course.

I would recommend WABET to anyone who wishes to further their skills.

ILLITERACY – SOLELY AN EDUCATIONAL PROBLEM?

Ute Jaehn
Arbeitskreis Orientierungs- und Bildungshilfe, Berlin

Introduction

Functional illiteracy is not only a problem with the written language but always includes a related problem too.

Becoming literate, therefore, is more than solely the acquisition of the written language, it also includes solving the related functional problem.

Every definition leaves something out, because it always deals with only partial aspects – whether it is the UNESCO definition or the above.

In our modern consumer society, in which knowledge and education are also consumed, being able to read and write inevitably has only an inadequate impact on the personal well-being of the person involved.

Theoretically, one could make a distinction and state that

a) inadequate mastery of the written language results in lower self-esteem or
b) defective acquisition of the written language can only result from existing personality defects.

For our problem it is unimportant what came first, it is merely a question of punctuation, i.e. it is arbitrary.

Studies on the origins of functional illiteracy make reference to multifactorial causes. One factor is the family circumstances, though it is more likely in this respect that reference will be made to class-specific circumstances.

Starting from the premises of system theory[1], I would like to direct attention to the family and the relationships of illiterate people and illustrate the value that can be attributed to these factors in the

development of learning problems (described using reading and writing problems).

In describing the Arbeitskreis Orientierungs- und Bildungshilfe [Orientation and Education Assistance Study Group], I am attempting to give an abridged, generalized description of the fight against illiteracy.

In section 2, I use three examples of specific cases (selected in accordance with the frequency with which they occur) to discuss in more detail the relationship between reading and writing problems and family structures.

In section 3, I examine the impact on the personalities of illiterate people of their inability to express themselves in the written language to the degree demanded by society.

Section 4 deals with the personalities of those who help illiterate people and attempts to show their compulsions and developmental defects.

Finally, section 5 deals with the impact of acquisition of the written language on the learner and his relationships with other people.

In the concluding section, I attempt to indicate critical aspects of this concept and to discuss possible changes.

1. Introduction and work of the Orientation and Educational Assistance Study Group, Berlin.

If adults come to us, the Orientation and Educational Assistance Study Group, their development as functional illiterates has been underway for a long time. We deal with very diverse personalities who are all motivated by – in addition to social circumstances - very personal motives, dreams of what they want from life, disappointments and developments which, in the last analysis, resulted in their not being able to acquire adequate proficiency in the written language.

In order for us to be able to offer each of these personalities concrete assistance on a practical basis, each individual's development and uniqueness has to be looked at, without losing sight of the factors he has in common with other illiterates.

We first attempt to acquire through counselling sessions an initial picture of the background which led the person concerned to decide

that he had a reading/writing problem, of his motivation in wanting to change his present condition and of his own assessment of his own knowledge level. This counselling is carried out by the counsellor either one-to-one with the person seeking help or with his spouse, mother, social worker – in brief an important reference person – present.

The reference persons are very important in this counselling process.

This may be illustrated by a small digression into the history of the Orientation and Educational Assistance Study Group. Until 1982/83 (the Orientation and Educational Assistance Study Group had been a non-profit organization since 1977), we always conducted the counselling sessions with the persons concerned alone.

At that date, the organizational division between counselling and instruction that we now have was not yet in place. All staff counselled participants and all gave courses. However, the participants were always counselled by someone other than their own instructor.

The people who had decided to take our program subsequently entered a two-month orientation course. In this orientation course, they then had the opportunity (usually for the first time in their lives) to exchange information with others who had similar problems and to gain insight into their own achievements (which they had previously disparaged) through the achievements of these other persons despite this defect (for example, supporting a family, obtaining a driving licence, having successfully concealed this weakness from friends and acquaintances etc.). This course, which 10–12 people usually took part in and which was given by two instructors, offered the instructors and counsellors an opportunity to compare the participant's own estimate of his level of knowledge with the instructors' assessment.

At the end of the two months, another counselling session was conducted with the participant in which motivation was examined, changes determined and precise goals agreed upon.

At the same time, the participant entered a learning group which usually consisted of 5–6 members and was guided by one or two instructors. Counselling sessions were conducted at intervals of 3–4 weeks.

At some point we were faced with the problem of *drop-outs*. There were various explanations for these. We were astonished to

discover that it was precisely those persons, who in our assessment had made good progress and something equivalent to a breakthrough, who dropped out, frequently without notice, without any concluding discussion.

This caused us to take a closer look at the other living conditions of the participants and to analyze more closely the impact of the participant's learning on his direct environment.

The result was the intensification and professionalization of the counselling process (through the continuing education of instructors and counsellors) by establishing the counselling/instruction structure and by including the reference persons in the counselling process.

At present, 7 people (3 graduate psychologists and 4 graduate teachers) work in the pedagogical-psychological field in the Orientation and Educational Assistance Study Group, 2½ in counselling and 4½ in instruction.

We counsel and instruct 80–100 participants for 175 hours per week. As a rule, participants attend a course for 1–3 years. The courses are held twice a week for two hours each time. The first contact is usually by phone and frequently at the urging of third parties (social workers, probation officers, friends, acquaintances, relatives, etc.).

The initial counselling sessions are conducted prior to the arrangement of the orientation phase, the second counselling sessions (examination of the assessment) at the end of two months.

Counselling sessions during a course can be initiated by the instructor, the participant or the counsellor herself. The reasons for this are varied, for example a participant may have a problem in the course which she cannot, however, discuss in class; another may have a problem in regard to her job, or the instructor thinks that a counselling session is called for based on her observations in class. This also applies to therapeutic sessions.

In principle, the participant has two discussion partners, and although the instructors may change, the counsellor will be responsible for the participant until the end of the program.[2]

Instructors discuss course problems in their team. The counsellors exchange information on counselling problems in the counsellor team. Both teams conduct concrete case discussions. The co-operation between the counsellor and instructor starts after the initial counselling session has been conducted, by the counsellor giving the instructor information about and assessments of future participants.

The second exchange takes place after the orientation course: the instructor gives the counsellor her impression of the participant, based on the information provided by the counsellor and the instructor's experience with the participant in the course.

Both then review the target plan.

The *target group* is a very diverse group. Recently, we have seen an increase in people who hardly know the letters of the alphabet. The range extends from illiterates (2–3 letters are recognized), to people with severe writing and reading problems, to people with minor reading and writing problems but who suffer greatly from them and experience an intense feeling of dependence.

Instructor and group

In our view the instructor's main responsibility is to guide the participant towards acceptance of responsibility for his learning process and to work out with him his individual learning strategy. Training the participant in the course to assume responsibility for his learning assumes a simultaneous, successive relinquishment of responsibility (and the willingness to do so) on the part of the instructor. For example, this occurs by the instructor not marking or correcting mistakes in a participant's text but making available to the participant a correct text (for example, the participant's text retyped on a typewriter), allowing him to compare the texts himself and discover his incorrect and correct words in this way.

Two things are achieved with this method. On the one hand, the learner is sensitized to his own sources of error, so that over a longer period of training he is put in a position to recognize crucial spots and, for example, to check them independently using a Duden [Translator: Duden is the tradename of a publisher of dictionaries and other reference works on German spelling, grammar, etc.]. His dependence on a controlling/helping person is decreased, his own ability to assess his work increased.

On the other hand, this method forces the participant to compare individual letters and, therefore, promotes the differentiation of visual perception. In addition, the instructor's request that the participant compare the texts and find incorrectly or correctly written words himself entails a high degree of confidence in his abilities. This is especially important if the participant has low self-esteem.

A precise analysis of the functions of the learning group would go beyond the limits of this essay, but I would like to point out a few essential functions.

In their everyday lives, illiterate people often do not know any other illiterates but only people who do not have any problems with the written language. Consequently, the group is frequently their first exposure to other people who are in the course for the same reason they are.

The image of themselves with which the participants begin the course is often a very negative one marked by assessments like: I cannot do anything, I have not accomplished anything, am stupid, a failure, and so on.

This negative self-image starts to crumble as a result of their meeting other participants in the group who have similar problems. The participant is more likely to recognize that the other participants are not stupid, have achieved something, etc.

The group has very important functions: from breaking down the old negative self-image to developing a positive self-image.

Another essential function is the space which the group makes available to try out new, unusual forms of interaction. The groups contain garrulous people, laconic people and many in between. It is not the instructor's responsibility to bring them all to one level but to see to it that no one is taken advantage of by another. Conflicts arising in the group are brought up by her and worked out together. It is essential that each group participant is included, which can usually only be guaranteed at the beginning by the instructor questioning individuals directly. Basic communication models often have to be learned first (listen, refer to what is being said, etc.).

The inclusion of each individual by the instructor results in a validation of each group member. They come to realize that someone is interested in their opinion.

We frequently observe with female participants in particular that they think they cannot contribute anything important to the group process, that their opinions are uninteresting. In our view, before the need to express oneself in writing can arise, the need to express oneself orally has to be developed and explored. The group offers an outstanding opportunity to do this.

The instructor's responsibilities extend far beyond specific instruction in the written language. Acquisition of the written language encompasses more than the acquisition of instrumental

capabilities and skills, it involves a change in the person of the learner and, therefore, a change in his views on life. How far an individual can go in this process depends on many factors, like relationships, work opportunities, environment and his own ability to change.

Counselling

As the above description made clear, the process of acquiring the written language entails more than the acquisition of the subject matter to be learned. It entails a change in one's very personal views, attitudes, assessments and leads to a change in one's perspectives on life.

This can result in severe psychological conflicts. As a result, counselling sessions have very different objectives. With one participant their purpose is to assess the use of the written language in everyday life, the reactions of others to this change, and to define at the same time further minor steps forward.

With others, the function of counselling is to guide them through crises and to support them in mastering these crises. The crises can be triggered by stagnation of the learning process, by great advances in learning, by changes in the everyday life of the person concerned, by their changing the person to whom they are attached, etc. Counselling makes clear more quickly whether the demands on the participant are excessive or too moderate.

The joint target planning of counsellor and instructor in regard to personality and the written language prevents this and makes it more likely that conflicts, antagonisms and refusal, etc. will be recognized and countered.

The methodological basis of the counselling is the holistic view of the person. The methods applied are based on individual psychology and system therapy.

A basic premise of the Orientation and Educational Assistance Study Group is that learning is a life-long process and everyone can learn, he only has to find the conditions under which he learns best and his individual learning tempo.

We are the escorts in this process for one to three years. In order to prevent, if at all possible, that what has been learned is unlearned again, or that the path of independence is left again, we refer in the program we offer the learner to his concrete everyday situation. The

learning program we offer is as individual as the concerns of the participant. For example, we teach skills, so that one person can accept a retraining course or another program from the employment office, we prepare another for his driving test, we teach basic knowledge so that a third can choose his groceries better, and much more.

For this purpose it is necessary to work together with other organizations in a close *co-operative network*.

These co-operative partners include the most varied counselling and contact offices (drug addiction counselling, women-in-crisis counselling offices, counselling offices for young people, disabled people, foreigners; welfare counselling offices, employment offices, Berlin Neighbourhood Homes, etc.), which refer people to us or to which we refer people. Frequently, people come to us who are lonely and who would like to have more regular contact with other people than we can offer them. In addition, we work with organizations for the handicapped (clinics, homes, residential communes, transit houses), whose clients we counsel and with whose contacts in these organizations we develop a realistic target plan for and with the clients. We also co-operate with public health offices, which counsel people seeking assistance and, for example, also provide therapy, with probation counselling organizations and family assistance offices. These agencies frequently send us clients. Information is exchanged (with the consent of the clients) with these agencies regarding the target plan and the course of the program.

We also co-operate with the organizers and implementers of programs to increase qualifications: either they send people to us or we attempt to send people to them.

In all cases, moreover, information is exchanged on the concrete goals, the planning for them, and whether it was possible to attain them or what prevented their realization.

In the continuing education sector, we refer to the Berlin Volkshochschulen [adult education centres] people who in our opinion are capable of participating in an adult education course (do not therefore require our extensive supervision); they are referred either right after the first counselling session or after they have participated in one of our courses (for varying amounts of time). Where people participate in one of our courses, we usually also offer to supervise them for a further quarter-year while they are taking an adult education course, in order to ensure that each client is well

integrated and does not terminate the adult education course as a result of any difficulties.

We also co-operate with other continuing education organizations, such as programs for young people aimed at their making another attempt at secondary school leaving qualifications.

Also, we are in contact with a few regular schools to the extent that once in a while they send us students who are in the top class, so that we can support them in a broader way than would be possible in the special programs in the schools themselves.

Twice a year we conduct an arithmetic course together with the Schöneberg Adult Education Centre (for our clients, too).

In co-operation with the Deutsche Bibliotheksinstitut [German Library Institute], we support (at present, however, specifically only one) libraries in selecting easy-to-read books with the goal of making libraries more accessible for adults who are learning to read.

These are the most important, but not all, of the institutions and agencies with which we co-operate.

The *financing* of the Orientation and Educational Assistance Study Group corresponds to the diversity of its clientèle. Our main source of financing is the uncovered demand financing by the Senatsverwaltung für Schule, Berufsbildung und Sport [Senate Administration for Schools, Vocational Training and Physical Education]. The Bundessozialhilfegesetz [Federal Social Assistance Act] provides other sources of income for which our clients can file individual applications for financing. In addition, there are also special agreements, such as that with the Karl-Bonhoeffer-Nervenklinik [Neurological Clinic], for which we run a course for a group of so-called mentally handicapped people.

2. **Reading and Writing Problems as Family Problems**

At first glance, the families of people with reading and writing problems are quite varied.

There is the illiterate or the person with writing problems who grew up in a village with 10 siblings, but there is also:

the person	whose sister passed the university matriculation examination;
the person	whose father was an alcoholic;

the person	in whose family violence and abuse occurred;
the person	whose parents are also illiterate;
the person	whose father has a high position in business;
the person	who grew up in a small family;
the person	who grew up in an institution;
the person	whose parents place no value on education;
the person	whose parents placed great value on education;
the person	who attended a special school;
the person	who has a junior high school diploma.

Despite these very different family backgrounds, there are common features which are defined via a defect.

There is the *defect* in competence in the written language and there are the dependent relationships entered into with the assistance of this defect – of course in all possible variations.

We can distinguish several basic patterns.

One basic pattern is that a child grew up in a family in which the parents had no time for their children and the children were forced to occupy themselves. Then the child experiences that a parent has time for it only when it cannot do something.

Stated somewhat briefly: after some time it learns to obtain attention through a defect. In this case, supervision of the homework assigned by the school is often the means. For example, the child experiences that when it cannot solve a problem, its mother sits down beside it and helps it to solve the problem. If it were able to solve the problem alone, the mother would not come. A *failure orientation* is born. Even if the attention given by the mother is very negative (for example linked with beatings), it still represents attention to the child which would not be given otherwise.

Once the pattern is learned, it is used again and again as a means of creating closeness. It becomes a basic pattern of human behaviour for the person concerned.

In his adult relationships, too, he will attempt to create closeness through the fact that he cannot do something, i.e. enter into further dependent relationships.

The idea of remedying this defect by becoming independent and learning to do what one cannot is no longer possible.

Case A: Nearness – distance – relation

Family background

Parents: Hanna, 50, Erwin, 52, self-employed
Children: Sabine, 22, and Hermann, 28

Client: Sabine, married to Uwe, 29. They have a daughter, Hilde, 5.

Hanna and Erwin both work outside the home, they have a newspaper stand. They are always taken up with work, at home too. Hermann, the brother, was always easy to look after, hardly had any problems at school. He obtained a technical matriculation certificate (electronics). Hermann made few demands on his parents. Sabine always perceived herself as someone who did nothing but take time away from her parents; she also always had the feeling that she received too little affection. For example, she hardly remembers any situations in which her parents played with her. Hermann was responsible for this, but he did not want to always be looking after his little sister. She was not allowed to bring friends home, because her mother thought that they only made work for her.

Sabine started elementary school at 6 years of age, where she attracted attention for her quiet, somewhat subdued personality. She was considered of average intelligence but had problems with spelling from the time she started to learn to read and write. Her intelligence was assessed as good. She completed the regular school attendance requirement and obtained her secondary school leaving qualification. Her parents, in particular her mother, supervised the children's homework, Sabine's too. She remembers that his often involved her crying, but her mother sat beside her for as long as it took to finish her homework. When Sabine was an adult and already had her own apartment, her mother continued to take care of Sabine's written affairs – including even the writing out of a love letter.

This prevented the mother and daughter separating and guaranteed a great intimacy over a long period. Sabine's mother was able to continue to feel responsible for her, and Sabine did not need to assume complete responsibility for herself.

Current living situation

Sabine now has her own family. Her husband is a computer specialist and her daughter is supposed to start school next year.

Her mother and husband now help her to take care of any written matters. Sometimes the two of them argue about whether what the other has done is correct.

After obtaining her secondary school diploma, Sabine became a hairdresser, and she worked as such. She stopped working once her daughter was born. In her own opinion, she has no problems with reading but makes many spelling mistakes when writing independently.

Sabine's motivation to improve her writing skills is found, on the one hand, in the fact that her daughter will soon be starting school and she does not want to look like a "stupid" mother to her daughter. On the other hand, she no longer wants to feel so dependent on her mother and husband, who sometimes make her acutely aware that she needs their help. It can, however, be clearly felt in the counselling session that she is also afraid to take this step.

Her husband and daughter are present during counselling. Her husband emphasizes that he would absolutely like his wife to be able to be more independent so that she no longer needs her mother. In his opinion, his wife and his mother-in-law are together so much for that reason. She would not need a perfect knowledge, because he is there and in any case it would be better if he did his daughter's homework with her.

It was agreed that Sabine should attend the orientation course. A counselling session was scheduled with her alone for two months later. Following this, a discussion might be conducted once again with her husband and her.

Assessment/course

As a girl, Sabine felt rejected by her parents. Neither of them had had much time for her. However, her parents were interested in her keeping up in school. If Sabine had had no problems in school, she would have received no time, or very little, from her mother for homework. In this way, Sabine learned to obtain attention from a person through a defect, specifically not being able to do something.

This attention was not solely positive for Sabine but very often negative, but it was time which her mother devoted to her.

This pattern continued during Sabine's subsequent life. She utilizes her husband for written matters just as she does her mother. However, the negative aspects of this pattern are becoming increasingly intolerable for her: being at the mercy of other people, having to rely on their help and, on the other hand, always being afraid that at some point there will be no one there to help. In addition, there is also her responsibility for her daughter.

Sabine does not know how the future will look for her and intuitively senses the risk she is undergoing in being willing to become more independent.

During the counselling session, I pointed out to her and her husband that their relationship will change if Sabine learns to handle the written language on her own. At the same time, I made clear that there was a good method of controlling this change. This method was learning slowly. If Sabine learned slowly and also made use of what she had learned in her everyday life at a slow pace, she would have an opportunity to check how her husband was reacting and whether she should perhaps stop learning for a while at some point. Also, her husband would have an opportunity to recognize changes in Sabine's behaviour early on and to make possible limits clear through his reaction. This would remove their fears of an unforeseeable future, allowing more planning and control.

It was an arduous path for Sabine, because her mother and husband put a great deal of pressure on her to terminate the reading and writing course when they realized that Sabine would soon no longer have to rely on them. Sabine reacted with strong guilt feelings but succeeded with the support of her instructor, the other group participants and her counsellor. Talks with her mother and husband together were necessary for this purpose, however.

Sabine has succeeded in re-defining her relationship to her husband and her mother. This success has not been attained in other cases, with the result that either the reading and writing course or the relationship was terminated.

Over a two-year period, Sabine improved her ability to write on her own to such an extent that, although she retained a few persistent spelling mistakes, she could live with them without having to turn to others for help.

Another basic pattern is that a child learns to express closeness through identification with one family member, combined with a simultaneous distance from another family member. This pattern is often found in families in which violence prevails. The weak members often exercise solidarity against the violent family member through their supposed weakness.

Case B: Partner substitute

Family background

Father: unskilled worker, alcoholic, 60 years of age
Mother: housewife, cleaning woman, 54
Children: 8 children, Lisa, 38, Kurt, 36, Hans, 35, Klaus, 33, Paula, 30, Anna, 27, Heike, 25, Susanne, 20

Klaus is the index patient. In his case, the family situation resulted in an identity problem.

Klaus always felt very drawn to his mother. He never really understood his father, nor his brothers Hans and Kurt. He got along best with Lisa, he always had to look after Susanne. He started elementary school at 6 years of age. After 2 years he was sent to a special school – he no longer remembers precisely who initiated this. School was no fun, with the exception of sports. He did not like to go to school, was often absent, but was not conspicuous for his behaviour but, if anything, inconspicuous. At home, neither his mother or father looked at his homework. His older siblings did not help him with his homework either, nor did he know whether in fact they had done any themselves. Lisa did not have problems with reading and writing, but he definitely knew that Kurt, Anna and Heike also had problems. His father could read and write. His mother had problems, she too could recognize only a few letters and only write her name. He always felt sorry for his mother, his father often beat her and told her how stupid she was, when he had been drinking. He often beat the children. He often had to protect his mother, but he had probably done too little. At some point she finally separated from him.

Current situation

Klaus is no longer in touch with his father, he visits his mother regularly. He now lives alone.

He can read to some degree, i.e. haltingly, but he can deduce information from a text, copying is no problem, he makes an enormous number of mistakes when writing on his own (turns letters around, omits things, misuse of upper and lowercase) to such an extent that the word cannot be recognized.

Klaus can follow the counselling discussion, has no comprehension problems whatsoever, grasps connections and can present things coherently.

Klaus worked for a long time in construction as a labourer, then became unemployed, and the employment office has now proposed that he do an apprenticeship as a bricklayer.

His poor German was noticed during a preparatory course. If he does not improve his German, he will not pass the course. In everyday life, he avoids reading and writing situations in public. Where such a situation cannot be avoided, it frequently results in his breaking out in a sweat: for example, when he is in the post office filling out a money transfer form. He is afraid that other people will realize from his sweating that there is something not right with him or that the postal clerk will point out to him that he has written something incorrectly.

Assessment/course

At the beginning of the counselling session Klaus was very anxious, reserved – he was sweating and rubbed his hands together.

His mother, to whom even today his attachment is very strong, was of central importance to him during his childhood. It was impossible for him to identify with his father, who was violent and drank. It is not inevitable that children in such families develop reading and writing problems. Many sets of symptoms can be expected.

Education was not a topic in this family and, nevertheless, some of the siblings have no, or few, problems with reading and writing.

How did it happen that Klaus developed problems? I developed the hypothesis that Klaus used his reading and writing problems to try to put himself on the same level with his mother and, therefore,

to guarantee her his support. If he were to learn to read and write it would result in problems for the relationship between himself and his mother.

Klaus entered the orientation course, and after two months I invited him and his mother to a discussion.

As we continued to work with Klaus and his mother, it became clear that Klaus' greatest fear was to become like his father. If he were to learn to read and write, it would be as if he were to leave his mother. His mother, on the other hand, was tormented by the fear that it was her fault that Klaus had not learned the written language adequately, because she had always bound him to her. He was her confidant in the family.

The generation boundaries in the family became blurred. Klaus was no longer her son but also a partner substitute for the mother. Even today Klaus was still the child who was most concerned about her and who visited her most frequently. She herself lived very withdrawn. She had no circle of friends of her own, organized her day around when her son visited her. These visits were the highlights of her life.

Mrs. B. looked depressed during the counselling session. In my opinion, the son could only be helped if the mother succeeded in developing more energy and interest in herself. Only then would she be able to let Klaus live his own life.

During a few individual discussions with the mother over half a year in which she first was able to recount all of her anguish and disappointments (for the first time in her life she confided in someone), we were able to develop a few small goals for her life.

On the one hand, her dependence on the Welfare Office bothered her; on the other, she found it convenient.

She developed the goal of looking for a job for herself as a cleaning woman for a few hours per week so that she would no longer have to rely on welfare. In addition, it became clear that she was interested in handicrafts but did not have the courage and energy on her own to find an appropriate outlet for this interest.

Mrs. B. timidly attended an adult education course in pottery and was surprised by her own skill and her enjoyment of it.

She also found a cleaning job for a few hours a week. However, she could increase these hours later. In the meantime (after 2½ years), Mrs. B. is actively involved with the Grey Panthers and appears well-balanced.

Klaus experienced problems when his mother began to become independent. He was afraid of losing the attachment to her and urged her to stop what she was doing. She was also afraid of losing him. By working with both of them for an extended period, it was possible for him to develop so much confidence in the stability of the relationship between him and his mother that both were able to continue the relationship on a more adult level.

Through increased practice and his great willingness and ability to learn, Klaus has now reached a point where he does not break out in a sweat when faced with having to write in public. He feels considerably more secure and no longer has any problems with reading, either. He still turns letters around and mixes them up when writing however. He began his apprenticeship as a bricklayer and is just about to complete it successfully.

In addition, he met a woman at work, with whom he has had a relationship for some time.

* * *

Another basic pattern is that the child is the link between the parents, i.e. assumes responsibility for holding the family together and for its functioning. This is frequently the case with couples who find their purpose in having a child and who more likely would separate if this wish were not fulfilled.

Right from the beginning the child is exposed to massive emotional demands which are obviously excessive.

On the one hand, it is supposed to be a child one can show off, who will become something; on the other hand, it is supposed to always remain with them, if possible, so that the parents are not faced with dealing emotionally with themselves and their problems. In spite of everything, the parents want the best for their child.

These children have great difficulty in maintaining a distance between themselves and their parents and in establishing limits, because they are threatened by permanent encroachments and demands and have parents who do not respect the boundaries between generations. Often the only way that these children have of establishing limits is through extreme behaviour, because nothing else would be accepted.

Case C: Connection

Family background

Father: bank worker, 58
Mother: housewife, 55
Son: Theo, 18

Theo is considered slightly mentally handicapped and has suffered from neurodermatitis since infancy. He was definitely a child who was wanted by his parents, both parents had great hopes for him and absolutely wanted a son.

The mother is present at the counselling session. The parents have many disappointments regarding Theo. Theo was sent to a special school for the mentally handicapped where he was always very conspicuous on account of his behaviour. For example, he tipped over chairs, always had problems concentrating right from the beginning, played the class clown.

Theo and his father did not get along at all, the father was too disappointed in Theo's lack of progress.

Current situation

Theo sits in the counselling session, making a great effort to appear bored. His mother would like him to learn something because she wonders, "What will become of him when we are no longer there?"

Theo still lives with his parents, in a small room. He knows all the letters of the alphabet but has difficulty in saying them. He can put letters together with a great deal of effort, but does not understand their sense. He can print his first name and last name in capitals. He cannot write his address. We reach agreement in the counselling session that one goal could be his writing his address on his own.

Agreement: Theo will take part in the orientation course. Parallel to this, regular counselling discussions were agreed on, which were supposed to be conducted both with Theo alone and also jointly with his parents.

Assessment/course

Theo was born relatively late. Mr. and Mrs. C had lived without children for a long time. Mrs. C was 37, Mr. C 40. In the course of the counselling program, it became clear that they both saw the goal of their life in raising a son, hoping to gain more closeness in their relationship through him. Prior to Theo's birth, neither of them had very much to say to the other, each of them lived more their own life rather than a joint one. Mr. C's life revolved around his work, Mrs. C was active as a church volunteer. Their hopes were directed towards Theo. Theo was a premature child and had to spend some time in the incubator of the hospital. As an infant he got neurodermatitis. He needed great care right from the beginning. Later new worries appeared: he had no interest in school, preferred to play or later on to go to a disco. Theo grew up very protected. He had no secure private sphere. His neurodermatitis allowed his parents to enter his room at any time of the day or night, because they were worried that he could become worse again and they wanted to prevent him scratching himself till he bled.

On the other hand, he was definitely aware of the opportunities inherent in his position. He had learned that he could strongly influence the emotional state of mind of his parents and made use of this knowledge, too. The parents were very worried about Theo's development and attempted to further him in every conceivable way (his own tutor, etc.). They now had a lot to say to each other and this allowed them to forget that there were problems in their relationship before Theo was born. Theo could not decide anything on his own, even regarding the clothes he wanted to put on. His parents decided what he was to do. His beginning a reading and writing course was also his parents' decision. Right from the beginning he had no real interest in learning. What interested him in the group was the other members; he began discussions with them, told them about himself and his newest favourite cassettes.

In order to protect himself against his parents' control and to establish a necessary distance, he rejected their proposals by proving to them that these did not work. He could simply not concentrate in the course. It was especially difficult for him to keep his parents at a certain distance, allowing him to develop on his own, because he was so eagerly awaited by his parents and especially since they both still looked after him in a loving manner. He could not run the risk

of hurting them greatly if he insisted on keeping them more out of his life. Theo received all of their attention, positive as well as negative. He could not fulfil the goal set for him unconsciously by his parents. If he became the son they truly had expected, he would hurt them and have to leave them. Then they would be alone with one another again. Through his disease and the fact that he was a difficult child, he held his parents together.

In the course he made it clear through his lack of interest that he was there because he wanted/had to please his parents. Under these conditions, Theo spoiled any chance he had to learn. The struggle with his parents, over who was to decide things, was being fought out in the arena of learning to read the written language.

I conducted a counselling session with Theo alone during which I presented the problems to him. Theo was relieved by the fact that he was understood. We agreed that I and his instructor should speak to his parents. I reached agreement with Theo that he would take a break of 2 months which he would make use of to draw up a list of priorities, what he liked doing and what he liked doing less (he wanted to make things clear). In addition, I gave him the task of asking himself every day what clothes he would like to put on, to reach a decision on his own and to assert himself against his parents.

In the discussion with his parents, it was very important to us to provide them with feedback in the form of our understanding that they had truly been very concerned about their son. As a result, we exonerated them and Theo. The second important point for us was to make clear to them that for Theo the reading and writing course represented taking the second step before the first. Before taking the course, he had to learn to make decisions on his own and to accept responsibility. At first, both parents reacted with: "He cannot do that, decisions have to be made for him." We negotiated an agreement with them that they did not have to give up all decisions and responsibility to Theo because this would place an excessive burden on him. However, they were to allow him one sphere for which he was responsible but which they could supervise – his clothes. In addition, we clarified with them that Theo was coming to the course out of love for them, but it was still beyond him, and that they should give him a chance to develop his own motivation. Both parents were very relieved by the discussion and wanted to observe the agreements.

Two months later, the father telephoned and reported that Theo still did not want to take a writing course but that things were much quieter at home, Theo appeared more balanced, his wife felt much better and the two of them were confident that Theo would still make something of himself because he was behaving in a much more adult manner.

3. **Personality Development**

The experience of not mastering social conditions which are "taken for granted", or not mastering them adequately, results in a more or less markedly negative self-image.

By adapting one's behaviour in a suitable manner, one attempts to keep this defect from the external world. In society today, anyone who has problems with written language is considered stupid. Very few of those concerned take the offensive and admit that they have a problem. In our experience, a large number are afraid of being revealed as illiterate and, therefore, stupid.

In counselling, we find again and again that the clients tend to blame their laziness or stupidity for their "failure" to learn properly. They are less likely to connect their own problems with other people in their direct environment, like parents or teachers. It is also "popular", however, to identify yourself as dyslexic. Then you are not responsible for the problem, for you cannot be held responsible for a disease, and you can use it to explain future failure.

Consequently, we consider the dyslexic concept, regardless of whether such a disease exists or not, as dangerous, because it renders those concerned passive in the face of their problems with the written language so that they can no longer see that their situation can be changed. We also deal with people whose written work was not evaluated in school because they were so called "dyslexics", i.e. they often have no ability to assess their situation at all in order to make a statement regarding their error frequency. As a result, they have a diffuse picture of their problems.

Fear of revelation is one great fear, another is the fear of failing again, of exposing oneself to the danger of disappointing others again. Another fear is to discover at some point that you are too stupid to learn.

As a result of society's evaluation of him and of the fears he has developed, the illiterate person is forced to develop a distrust of others. Sometimes it takes a long time for him to develop trust in others. We have had cases in the Orientation and Educational Assistance Study Group in which spouses of many years knew nothing about the illiterate person's writing problems. In most cases, however, at least the partners are aware of the problem and are involved in it because they provide support. This mistrust forces illiterates to keep control of every situation, which frequently results in their seeking out old, known situations, and avoiding new ones. This leads to a narrowing of their individual behaviour patterns and, in the last analysis, of their personalities.

As a result of their lack of competence in the written language in an environment oriented towards the written language, illiterates are forced to invent their own orientation systems. For example, a woman who bought food for her cat oriented herself on the different colours of the tins; a man, who had to distribute medication in a clinic, on the colours and geometric shapes of the packages. He did not make a single mistake in 15 years.

Reducing perception and transfer skills to the non-written extends skills in other directions, in the same way, for example, as the hearing of a blind person improves.

Another skill which is well trained as a result of the fact that nothing can be written down is the ability to note and to memorize things. We continually see in the courses, for example, that someone who cannot read can remember a DIN A4 page of material which is read aloud to them and reproduce it word for word. A performance which otherwise only eidetics are capable of.

There are always dependent relationships with literate people because everyone has to fill out at least a form at some point. This implies a feeling of helplessness, of being at the mercy of others as well as a feeling of "power" because you have someone who helps you and give him the opportunity to show that he can do more than you.

This is linked with the fear of being exploited, being taken advantage of.

Where you take the risk of learning, there are often fears that the other person will leave you if you can manage it yourself.

4. The Co-illiterate

Mothers are frequently very close reference persons of illiterates and partners. These reference persons can also be professional helpers, however, like social workers. The basic pattern is that they can always feel better than the illiterate, in this connection their perhaps minor problems with the written language are less likely to be noticed, for example. They are often people who are themselves very insecure, who lack social recognition and who feel morally superior, of greater value, as a result of their partner's illiteracy. They need such a partner because they do not regard themselves as particularly valuable.

Often this is combined with the fear that their friends could discover that they spend time with a "stupid" person, which could lead to conclusions regarding their own person. In addition, there is the fear that their partner may only be with them or remain with them because he needs them. In this case, too, a low self-esteem is found.

If your partner starts a reading and writing course in order to learn – which you yourself may have advised him to do – the fear arises that he could learn to read and write well and then leave you. The helper can only feel better than the illiterate as long as he can still help. Where his help is no longer needed, it can lead to personality breakdowns, like depression, etc. in extreme cases.

Mothers who see their life's work in helping their adult son take care of written matters and, consequently, maintaining his status as a child become afraid of losing the son, who might have only come to visit them when he needed help with written matters.

The helper is dependent on being able to help. If his help is no longer needed, he is forced either to seek new fields in which he can provide help or to change his personality. The struggle will always be directed mainly towards maintaining the existing patterns. Of course, it must be taken into account that the helper does not intend to harm the person he is helping.

5. Changes in Relationships/in Personality

To learn means to change. Where people attend a course they want to change, to alter, something. If possible, however, in such a way

that everything else remains as it is. Only a part is to be changed and, if possible, without pain. It is only during the course that the breadth of the changes in their personalities and relationships become clear.

Where an illiterate who, for example, only knows a few letters learns to use these letters in a sensible way, to expand his knowledge and can then write his name without help, this represents a change in his personality and in his partner relationship. He will learn to have more confidence in himself, to try something on his own, no longer to rely on the other person so much. This also means that the other person must be willing to change, to give up something and to risk acquiring a partner who is somehow different. This is a difficult process that requires guidance. In learning part of the written language, the illiterate acquires more than merely that. He learns that he can learn, that he can be independent, that he can have more respect for himself. He also learns, however, that he contributed to his not being able to read and write in the past. He learns that he can influence his situation, can change it.

His first successful learning experience, one which he also considers as such, is a crucial point in his learning history. It is decided at this point whether he trusts himself to enter into more new experiences or whether he or his partner is afraid of changing and he does not want to risk the relationship.

At this point, discussions are necessary with both persons concerned, in which their fears may have to be verbalized with the support of the counsellor, because the one does not believe the other capable of having such fears. The significance of bringing up and discussing these fears and the matter-of-factness with which this is done is an enormous psychological relief for both partners.

Getting involved in the learning process once again means being willing to relinquish old orientation systems with which one always had problems but which have helped one for years and decades. It also means wanting to subject oneself to learning experiences regarding which one cannot know whether they will help one more than the old and result in recognition. Added to this is the fact that all adult illiterates have had negative learning experiences in attempting to learn to read and write.

6. Summary/Assessment

There is not only *one* method of teaching people to read and write. Restriction to one method of acquiring the written language (corresponding to the prevailing spirit of the times, either the analysis/synthesis method or, for example, the whole word method) in elementary school definitely contributed to the occurrence of reading and writing problems. The willingness to learn, capability to learn, the learning tempo and the learning opportunities of the individual student had to be disregarded in this case.

This mistake was repeated when the first attempts were made to teach illiterates to read and write in Europe as well as in the first years of the Orientation and Educational Assistance Study Group. At that time, the preferred method was morpheme segmentation[3]. This lost in popularity to the language experience approach[4]. In the meantime, the view has also gained acceptance in the literacy movement that the method used

a) must correspond to the learning level of the participant and
b) must be applicable by him in everyday life.

Application in everyday life involves a change in the learner's attitude. For example, if on the way home from the course a beginner in the literacy program tries to find in his environment the A he has learned, this change in attitude would have been achieved. This change in attitude signifies a change to an active involvement and a farewell to passive suffering. It also signifies assuming responsibility for one's own learning process.

We have counsellors and instructors available to support this process. For us, the convincing aspect of our approach is the opportunities it offers the participants, opportunities which are included in a program offering, on a broad basis, recognition of his developmental steps and the necessary support measures. However, the prerequisite for this is intensive co-operation between the instructors, between the counsellors, and between the counsellors and instructors. It is precisely this that is the difficult aspect of this concept in practice.

The co-operation required, for example to develop small partial goals for the participant's learning process, becomes problematic if there is competition among the instructors or between the counsellors

and instructors. The danger exists that this competition will result in doubts and reservations not being expressed, developments not being perceived, one's own assessment being asserted obstinately against one's better judgement. The demands on the skill of the instructors and counsellors who want to work with this method are high.

This co-operation will only succeed if the instructors and counsellors are willing to work on their own learning problems and thus to learn constantly to expand their assessment of their own person. Critical reflection in the instructor or counsellor team[5] also expands viewpoints and is indispensable for a professional program.

As a result of the double opportunity for participants to address problems and of the need for constant skills improvement, such a structured program is an expensive but efficient method. However, it is not necessary to offer such close supervision for all illiterates; many do not need it, but the opportunity should be created for those requiring this assistance.

We do not assume that this approach is the exclusive literacy concept. Rather, greater differentiation is necessary in literacy work than was previously the case, so that the great variations in people with reading and writing problems can be taken into account.

Notes

1. Every action is communication. One cannot not act. Within a system, the actions of an individual affect all members of the system. If one variable in the system changes, then the system has to be redefined.

2. Unless the counsellor establishes that her own learning history prevents her from being able to offer the participant appropriate counselling. Should this be the case, she will transfer the participant to another counsellor.

3. Breaking down words into their smallest meaningful units. Example: Kleid-er-ständ-er.

4. Words, sentences, etc., are developed on the basis of the everyday language experience of participants.

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KNOWING WHERE WE ARE: PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND ADULT LITERACY

Mary Hamilton
Roz Ivanic
David Barton
Lancaster University, U.K.

1. Introduction

In this paper we outline the work we are doing in linking research and practice in adult literacy. We explain our aims, how far we think we are achieving them and the main practical principles underlying our approach. We also place our work in the context of other similar efforts and traditions which have contributed to our own ideas.

Although we are based in a university, as members of the Research and Practice in Adult Literacy group (RaPAL) we work closely with experienced practitioners and learners in adult basic education, who are searching for new ways of reflecting on their experiences and acting on the knowledge they have. In drawing together in one place ideas that have come from many, we hope that the paper will be useful to others who are interested in new models of human enquiry: ones which enable us to share power and knowledge with one another and assert the value of firsthand experience as a source of information as real as any of the traditionally privileged "objective" measures.

2. What is Research?

What is research? Is it something you might do in your everyday life? What kind of activities count as research? There are many examples of activities where it is uncertain whether they count as research. Is it research to put together a petition to persuade the local council to instal street lighting? Finding out what makes people come to an adult education group? Finding out what sort of learning opportunities people would like in your local area? Why people put

full stops where they do when they write? Asking people how they feel about the local variety of the language they speak? What it was like at school 20 years ago? Finding out whether local schools are interested in setting up parent support groups, and what works and what doesn't? Finding out what students like about the ABE group they belong to? Finding evidence to convince people that dyslexia exists?

Our answer is that all these activities involve research. Research is asking questions, seeing patterns, finding out in some systematic way the information you need to answer the questions. Sometimes research is needed to convince other people of something you already know and includes finding ways of recording the answers and then communicating them to others. (For more examples and a more detailed answer to the question of what is research, see *Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Bulletin* Nos. 9 and 12; Ivanic and Baynham, 1985; Lobley, 1988; Barton and Murphy 1990).

3. **Why Link Research and Practice: The Great Divide**

Traditionally, research has been done by a few experts - governments, journalists, academics. A few people get to ask the questions, most people answer other people's questions. Their own questions go unnoticed and don't even seem to be important. The traditional research model has been called "objective" research, suggesting that it is neutral and therefore nearer to the truth. But it is also "outsider" research - the perspective of someone who does not know how it feels and who doesn't have the same stake in it as those involved. This "outsiderness" has been seen as a virtue. However, it is easy to argue the opposite: that being an outsider is an unacceptable constraint on understanding and acting to change things. It is not an objective, impartial perspective, just a different one; and if not balanced by "insider" views it can be completely one-sided.

As one American practitioner puts it: "Given this framework, ordinary people are rarely considered knowledgeable or capable of knowing about their own reality.....people are research subjects and knowledge about their lives is created and carried away by "experts"." (Gillespie 1989)

The traditional research model has reinforced boundaries and separated researchers from the researched, academics from prac-

titioners, creating a great divide that we stare mistrustfully across. This divide is apparent in practical ways that become obstacles to working together.

Because of our dissatisfaction with the way that traditional research has been carried out, what has been valued and what dismissed and despised as sources of information, and how research is viewed as a result of this set-up, we hoped to be able to encourage a different model within the field of adult literacy. As a field, Adult Basic Education (ABE) in the UK had developed very rapidly with many innovations but few resources. Where they existed, written reports or other records of innovatory projects were often not widely circulated or systematically followed up.

When RaPAL began, research into this field was almost non-existent. After 10 years of experience in ABE in the U.K. many of those involved felt the need for time to reflect and share what had happened. ABE itself has developed in the U.K. with a strong learner-centred philosophy which is at odds with the traditional model of research. This creates both an opportunity and an imperative to do things differently.

4. Research and Practice in Adult Literacy: What we (and Others) are Doing

When we began, we had some knowledge of traditions nearest to literacy work. These are traditions of teacher research in schools (Rudduck and Hopkins, 1985; Walker, 1985; Duckworth 1986) of community publishing (Morley and Worpole 1982; Fitzpatrick, 1990), community development (Lovett, Clarke and Kilmurray 1983) of the ideas of Paulo Freire and the notion of popular education that has grown out of his work (Freire, 1985; Kirkwood and Kirkwood 1989; Arnold and Burke, 1983). As we developed our approach we came across other people who seemed to be aiming for the same things, albeit in a different field or with a different emphasis from our own: feminist writers and researchers searching for new ways of documenting women's experience and understandings (Roberts 1981; Spender, 1980; Olson, 1980; Acker, Barry and Esseveld 1983); oral historians (Duffin, 1989); action research within educational or other organizations (The Talk Workshop Group, 1982; Goswami and Stillman, 1987; Reason, 1988) which is usually small-scale, focused

on a specific set of circumstances, a problem or innovation and documents change as it happens.

All these traditions lead to a central idea of "participatory research" where those affected by the research are in control of it, and the decisions that shape it (See Hall, 1984; Participatory Research Network, 1982).

We are still finding other strands which connect with us, getting clearer at articulating what we see as the core ideas to our approach, the key principles of a participatory approach to researching literacy. Our own focus has been on finding out how adults make sense of literacy, what they use reading and writing for, and how they learn. However, adult learners of literacy themselves do not necessarily have such a narrow view of how they can use research for their own purposes, and as their voice becomes heard in the research process, so the agenda changes.

RaPAL began with a series of conferences bringing together practitioners and academic researchers. Although our original thought was to generate specific questions for research, we quickly moved onto broader questions of what is meant by research, what counts as research, critiquing the traditional model of research and thinking about who does it and why, who benefits from it. A first step was to form a network, mainly within the U.K., but also making contact with people in other countries who are thinking along the same lines. RaPAL began to publish a regular bulletin paying conscious attention to finding a way of talking about research that is accessible, and providing an outlet for reports and projects that would not have otherwise got into print. The newsletter is edited and published collectively, and the process of doing this itself has strengthened our links and clarified our aims.

Here we we want to describe two other activities through which we are beginning to make new links and to discover the difficulties and rewards of pushing the research and practice approach further. Firstly, we have been organizing workshops on research techniques that involve both learners and teachers in ABE. Secondly, we have been working collaboratively with people learning new forms of writing to research the process and changes they are going through.

5. "Doing Research" Workshops

The first type of activity we want to describe are the "Doing Research" Weekends we have been involved in, one organized by people at the Lee Community Education Centre, London, and the other by people at Bradford and Ilkley Community College in the North of England. The lessons we have learned from the "Doing Research" workshops have been written up in two issues of the RaPAL bulletin and a longer paper (See RaPAL Bulletins, Nos. 9 and 12; McMahon et al 1991). These workshops followed the model of a residential weekend organised by the National Federation of Voluntary Education Schemes NFVES: during this weekend students, tutors and researchers met to choose and plan a joint project which they later carried out together and wrote up (Mace and Moss 1988).

Each meeting had a different focus. The Lee Centre weekend offered sessions on research skills. There were sessions on doing interviews, experiences of dyslexia, what happens in groups, recruiting black tutors, using video, writing questionnaires, using personal stories, writing up and publishing research results.

The Bradford weekend was a mixture of small groups planning their own research projects and people telling about research they had done. The projects that were put together during the weekend were: a video exchange between two groups about how people change as they learn; understanding learning in groups; getting to and staying in classes (a research and publicity project); a history/writing project; producing an investigation pack for groups on "what is literacy?".

As you would expect, many good things came from these workshops (planned and unplanned!) but we also learned from mistakes we made.

It was important that people came in small groups together, not as individual participants. The best combination seemed to be a group of two or three students, together with a tutor they knew well. This gave people the chance to work together beforehand to prepare for the workshop, and often it enabled them to carry on afterwards. It also helped ensure that individual students got support from one another and from tutors during the weekend. We got wiser about the need for such support from meeting to meeting. The ideal would be fully collective planning for the workshop, but this is difficult if participants are spread across the country. The idea of small groups

feeding in their views and plans is a first step towards joint organization. It still leaves a lot of responsibility and practical planning for the event in the hands of a small group.

People came to the workshops with different expectations and these were often unclear. It is important to find out early on what people want to get out of the event and to sort out potential confusions. Getting to know one another at first is essential if people are going to relax into learning. Thinking about how this can be done at the very first session such as games and icebreakers is very important. It actually starts before this, from the minute people arrive. At the very beginning it is useful to agree some simple "ground rules" that will help people to ask for and give each other the support that is needed. At Bradford our ground rules were:

1. Appoint a wordwatcher (this is someone who is responsible for asking for explanations of long words, jargon and abbreviations)

2. Appoint someone to take notes

3. Make sure everything is read out

4. Make sure everyone who wants to speak does

5. Make sure everyone understands everything that is discussed

6. If you want to write, ask for help if you need it

Finally, a successful workshop has a flexible structure and allows people time to reflect and understand. While it is important to plan sessions in advance, and some people have to come prepared to organize sessions, it is also necessary to allow for the unexpected. Some needs come to the surface only as the weekend goes on, and it is important to be able to respond to these by rescheduling events and making room for new ones. For the first time in Bradford we had a group from another country - Germany. At first we worried about how this would work, especially how we would deal with translating between different languages. It soon became clear that the presence of this group was an added bonus to the event. Translating

between languages helped us all by forcing people to explaining clearly and by slowing us all down enough to give time for everyone to check out their understanding of activities with each other.

6. Research Which Grows out of Learning

A very different sort of activity is where a specific researcher works with learners on a small-scale research project. Roz Ivanic describes two examples of working in this way with learner-writers at Lancaster College of Adult Education. In each case the research grew out of one-to-one teaching, so it fitted naturally into the regular activities of the programme.

Research about punctuation

In this research I talked with ten learner-writers about the drafts of the writing they were doing to put in the college magazine. In ordinary tuition we might not have talked about every single full stop and comma they used, or every single place where a punctuation mark was missed out, but because it was "research" we did. Because it was "research" the learners didn't take my attention to their punctuation as correction or criticism. Rather, we all approached the task with curiosity - trying to figure out why the full stops and commas have to go where they do, and why the writers put them where they did. The writers got the same benefits as they would have done from an ordinary one-to-one tuition session; they learned more about how to use the conventions of punctuation as a result of our discussion.

We tape-recorded the discussions, and I then worked on the recordings, writing down all the explanations everyone gave for their choices of full stop or comma. I divided these into "punctuating by quantity", "punctuating by sound", "punctuating by meaning" and "punctuating by structure", and I counted up the number of times people used different punctuation strategies successfully and unsuccessfully. I found out, for example, that "punctuating by sound" works better for placing commas than for full stops.

I then wrote up the results in two ways. One was a short article for the college magazine, telling everyone - students and tutors -

what we had found out so that it could help them in their future work. The other was a longer article with more detail about linguistics (Ivanic, 1988).

Research about conflict of identity in academic writing

This research grew out of my work as a volunteer for the College, first with John Simpson, then with Denise Roach. They are both students who returned to study in their 20's having left school with no qualifications. In both cases we gradually turned our "tuition" sessions into "research" sessions. The difference between tuition and research was quite subtle. In "tuition" I was suggesting how they could improve their writing; in "research" we were discussing why they wrote what they wrote, how it differed from conventional writing, and what they wanted to do about it. Instead of always talking about how the writing should be done, Denise and John often gave good reasons for keeping it the way it was, and as a result of our discussions, they often had the confidence to stand up for their own ways of writing. I think the main difference was in our relationship. In "tuition" I was the knower, the tutor, the teacher. In "research" we were joint investigators, each bringing different insights to the problem at hand. It seemed that by turning tuition into research we were putting into practice two fundamental principles of ABE: maintaining equality among adults and empowering learners. John and Denise still said that they learnt a lot about academic writing from these sessions, even though the focus was not on learning. That is, they didn't feel they were giving up their time to research for my benefit only.

When John and I had been working in this way for two years, it occurred to us that we might also write about our observations collaboratively. Our first piece was called "Clearing away the debris: learning and researching academic writing". Writing this title was like the whole piece; we both wrote our own version, then we put them together. "Clearing away the debris" was John's image for the way we worked together; "learning and researching academic writing" was my rather drier description of what I thought we were doing. This was published in the RaPAL Bulletin (1988). Since then we have written a much longer article to be published in a book (Ivanic and Simpson, 1991). Meanwhile, Denise and I had begun working together and have also written up our insights collaborative-

ly (Ivanic and Roach, 1990). We think it is particularly important for us to write in a way that other mature students and their tutors can understand. John and Denise keep a constant watch over my writing in this respect!

Research is a natural development for one-to-one teaching and learning situations. Learners and tutors often discuss a piece of writing in order to figure out how to improve it. By keeping records of these discussions they can collect information which may eventually be interesting to other people - in other words, research.

7. Making Changes: How to Link Research and Practice

Paulo Freire pointed out ways in which literacy is a form of power. Literacy that is imposed and learned for other people's purposes helps to enslave them. Literacy that is self-generated and springs from people's own needs to communicate and act on the world is empowering. The same is true of research: it is not neutral but it always serves some purpose. Our business is to see to it that research about literacy serves the learners' purposes. If there is one basic principle to this approach, it is therefore one of sharing power.

Other common themes in the activities described above are the theme of reclaiming voice, breaking silence - allowing perspectives, experiences to be spoken and heard that have not been present in traditional research. Our notion of research includes the outcome. Reflection or finding out should be closely linked to action. Often the focus is on solving problems. Within learning groups, this becomes an insistence that what we are doing when we learn and teach is a form of research, and that it makes no sense to divide these activities into separate worlds.

How then can we share power, amplify voices, connect reflection and action? Here are the core practical steps that we have identified as essential to link research and practice.

Learners guide the goals of research

This is crucial, difficult and of all the links will probably have the most far-reaching effects. We have learned something about how this can be done through our "doing research conferences". We need to invent a new format of "conference" to make it a comfortable forum for people to meet and genuinely exchange knowledge. It means

researchers, teachers, learners all talking to each other, making opportunities to reflect on our different and similar experiences, setting goals, identifying problems together. Funding is essential for this to enable everyone to take part. In the case of both "Doing Research" weekends we had to find money to support students to be there, both travel and living expenses.

Learners share in the process of research as active decision-makers, not as objects of it

This involves agreeing a framework, deciding how the research will be done, and being involved in all stages of it: collecting and recording information, interpreting the results and having a say in what is written up. It entails openly discussing what the research is about and why it is worth doing.

This shared research has some important outcomes that make it better than traditional research. Firstly, the learners find that researching their own learning helps them to understand it and so do it better in future. In this way research feeds into practice. Secondly, learners have a right to the research skills involved: it is empowering in itself to know how to carry out interviews, how to put a questionnaire together and how to organize information into a report that will convince others.

Thirdly, because the learners themselves were involved in the research process their detailed insights, comments, opinions and perceptions are included more centrally than they might have been if they were just the subjects of research. The research results are richer as a result. We described an example of this above in the research on punctuation.

Finally, shared research ensures that different sources of information are included and given equal status: it is built on the assumption that first-hand experience is a valid source of data and an essential complement to outsider sources and understandings.

Learners and researchers write about their research collaboratively

We described an example of this in the research on the conflict of identity adults feel when they return to learning. Collaborative writing is not easy but it is worth it. As well as upholding the general principle of shared credit for shared understanding, it has other benefits for all concerned. Firstly it avoids the problem most researchers have about whether they have represented their "infor-

mants'" views properly. Writing the report collaboratively means that the "informants" have control over what is being said about them. They can ensure there is no breach of privacy, or misrepresentation of their ideas.

Secondly, all participants learn a lot about writing in the process. By sharing the process with a more experienced writer, the students learn things about writing which are impossible to teach by conventional methods. The researcher, stuck in a style of formal, academic writing, learns ways of expressing herself which will be more accessible to other people. This includes making the writing more "speech-like" in various ways, and using more vivid metaphors rather than explanations full of dry, abstract nouns.

It can also solve the problem of acknowledging your sources. In traditional research reports the people who provided the information are usually gratefully acknowledged and then dismissed - often disguised with pseudonyms in the main part of the report. The report is written about adult literacy students, but not written by them. As a result, the "researchers" gain the status of experts and the adult literacy students do not. One way of challenging this is to make sure the learners have their names on the articles and books about them along with tutors and researchers. Involving all research participants in the writing and in conferences where the research is discussed are other ways of giving credit where credit is due: the people who understand adult literacy from the inside are the people credited with knowledge-making about it.

8. **Conclusion**

Participatory research and action is the logical model for literacy work because of the philosophy behind the teaching and because learning literacy is about creating knowledge (in Freire's words: reading the world); strengthening voices that have been silenced (writing who you are) and telling others what you have discovered (reaching an audience).

RaPAL developed in response to this need but has so far only begun to explore the long path of realising it. Finding links with others working in the same direction has been important to us. We

hope this paper will enable others to share this view of the possibilities for future research in literacy and work with us to make changes.

Note

RaPAL, the Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Group, can be contacted at Bolton Royd Centre, Manningham Lane, Bradford BD8 7BB, UK. Our bulletin appears three times a year and back issues are available.

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT AMONG THE GYPSIES OF SÃO GREGORIO

Olívia Oliveira, with the
cooperation of Sameiro Nova
and Glória Coelho
Braga, Portugal

1. Introduction

The community development project being carried out in the township of São Gregório, on the outskirts of the city of Braga in northern Portugal, began at the initiative of the Regional Social Security Office as an effort to improve living conditions among the gypsies of São Gregório. The aim is to help them survive without social assistance, to facilitate their integration into Portuguese society, and to set up specific links for mounting a cooperative effort between the Portuguese Red Cross, the Municipal Council of Braga (local government), the School Extension Program (Adult Education Division), the Health Centre, the Employment and Vocational Training Institute, the Manufacturers Association of Minho, and the Sports and Recreation Directorate. Apart from the Social Security Office, the organizations which have played the most important role in this effort are the School Extension Program and the Health Centre.

The idea of the project first arose when the Regional Social Security Office began to notice that the gypsy community of São Gregório was increasingly reliant on its services, becoming the heaviest users of its social benefit programs. However, their growing resort to the Social Security Office did not mean that members of the community knew how to obtain more and better benefits.

Closer examination of the relevant files revealed serious deficiencies at the social, economic and educational levels in São Gregório.

This preliminary study concluded that there was a need for action and so planning began for a community development project, which was

launched in April 1988. The project was divided into three stages: (1) diagnosis of problems, (2) execution of programs and assessment of results, and (3) transition stage towards full independence of the gypsy population. We are now in the third stage of the project.

Project design

Since it cannot subsidize projects directly, the Regional Social Security Office began by establishing a link with the Portuguese Red Cross, whose status as a nongovernmental organization (NGO) made it eligible for funding. In this way, it was possible to make available the resources necessary to carry out the project that was taking shape.

To launch the project a staff of four full-time field workers was appointed by the Social Security Office, consisting of two social workers and two educators. Support and coordination was provided by a team made up of representative staff members from the various agencies involved and including the author of this report.

Several basic questions had to be answered before the project could be designed.

Since the target community consists of an economically depressed group belonging to an ethnic minority, it was essential to find out what differences existed between this and other marginal groups whose outward signs, behaviour and attitudes otherwise appear to be identical.

How do we perceive the gypsies? Is there any truth to the more or less common impression of a group of sordid individuals, cunning swindlers, cheats, liars, and dangerous, violent thieves?[1] Or are these false preconceptions based on external appearances developed in self-defence, while their real personalities are only revealed within the group? And what do the gypsies think of us? How do they see us? For that matter, how do they see themselves and their role as a group within a dominant foreign culture?

Thus, we should start by questioning the accuracy of our preconceptions about them and discovering how they perceive us. By examining the socio-cultural fabric of the community, delimiting areas of conflict and opposition, and clearly defining the openings that will permit assured access to the gypsy people, we hope to remove obstacles that prevent interrelationships, gain their confidence and convince them to take part in the project.

Next we asked ourselves what approach to take. Should we begin with their culture, and work towards that of the dominant community? Or should we develop the project entirely within the context of the latter? This option may lead to complications in the make-up of the project since the gypsies do not carry on their daily life in a vacuum. As a merchant people they must have contacts and negotiations with non-gypsies. They are Portuguese citizens and must relate to our institutions. And they are immersed in a society which is full of challenges and rapid change, particularly now that the pace of modernization is accelerating in Portugal as the European Economic Community approaches complete integration.

We concluded that they could not be self-sufficient if they remained locked in their own little world, that they could not develop in cultural isolation. For it is by having contact with, and confronting, other social values that a group can grow. In theory it is possible to confront these other values without undermining what is essential in one's own culture. The aim then is to integrate the new into the traditional way of life, recognizing that traditions are not absolutely immutable, that they do evolve over time reflecting the progress of the society that cherishes them.

There was one other risk to consider. In the process of undergoing change, the gypsies must be prevented from falling into hybrid behaviour patterns that might strip them of their group identity and leave them in a cultural no-man's-land. Experience teaches that gypsies, like other disadvantaged minorities who found themselves in these circumstances, might then retreat into themselves, closing off all access and preventing the hoped-for changes. Or, driven by their insecurity, they might lash out with even less desirable behaviour.

To ensure against this, it was decided that the project should include constant monitoring of the target group (hence the need for four full-time field workers), as well as promoting cultural activities that would facilitate the restructuring process or the eventual emergence of an internal framework enabling individuals and the group as a whole to understand the phenomena taking place within their community.

Another question that needed answering was how to approach the community. Should we go in as big brother claiming to know what is best for them, or should we take the opposite tack and try to

identify with the community and its problems, letting them decide what it is they want and what can be done?

There is a very real risk with the first approach that once the project is over and the last field worker has left, the community will go right back to the way it was before. To avoid this, we chose the second approach. The project was thus designed as a participatory development effort enabling the community to acquire the necessary skills that would lead it gradually in the direction of real autonomy.

The first step was to sit down with them and reflect on the root causes of their poor health conditions, poverty and marginalization - in short, to analyze with them their problems, needs and aspirations; to help them examine their objectives and realize that these are not cast in stone. It was important to make them see that the persons intending to work with them in the community had no wish to take them where they did not want to go. Rather, they should sit down together and decide what path to take and which solutions are best. They must be made to see that before they can gain access to the benefits of the larger society in which they are immersed, they will have to take certain steps to prepare themselves for the enjoyment of these benefits - steps which require effort and involvement on their part.

With this as background, the general philosophy of the project can be summarized in the following beliefs:

- Everyone has a right to both cultural diversity and individual variations from the norm.

- There is no such thing as a superior or an inferior culture, only dominant and immersed cultures.

- People have an innate potential for learning and thought, which well-designed activities can release.

- To be free (not subservient), people must have the right to participate in the changes taking place in their own lives and the life of the community.

- There is need for an ongoing study of communities to obtain deeper and more extensive knowledge of the dynamic interactions taking place within the community.

From these beliefs are derived the guiding principles on which the social action plan of the project are based:

- Respect for persons and their diversity.

- Objective analysis of cultures permitting critical examination of diverse cultural values and facilitating dialogue and comparison with the new values of today's interdependent world.

- The starting point will be a continuing study of the community, seeking suitable ways of meeting its needs and solving its problems, based on the objectives set for the project.

- The people themselves must take part in all phases of the project through their legitimate representatives, and particularly in any final decisions that are reached. All aspects of the project must be designed by and for the people it is aimed at.

- The emphasis is on developing people skills (rather than on the intellectual level or cognitive learning); encouraging the relational, behavioural and organizational skills that will permit change and relativization of social roles; and acquiring the essential tools required to take control of one's own life and that of the community.

The literacy campaign

As theirs is a culture based on oral traditions, the gypsies cannot be faulted for not writing their own language. It is with respect to the dominant language, Portuguese, that they are illiterate.

This illiteracy, in the midst of a society in which writing is omnipresent, denies them access to information essential to their daily lives - information needed to improve their living conditions and ensure their welfare.

Although they have no need for these skills in their own language, their inability to read and write the language of the dominant culture complicates their daily lives, makes it hard for them to relate to Portuguese society and hinders access to public services. Above all it cuts them off from the advantages and privileges reserved for citizens, including training opportunities.

This being the case, it was immediately obvious that an adult literacy campaign should be one of the first tasks undertaken in São Gregório.

Accordingly, a program was launched even before the diagnosis stage of the project had been completed, with the added benefit that it helped field workers obtain information and gain familiarity with the gypsy community.

Harking back to Paulo Freire, there is solid philosophical evidence for expecting this approach to work. For in following this path, we are recognizing man's universal capacity to learn wherever he has the means to do so, as well as the absence of these means within certain structural segments of society; and attempting to develop self-awareness among the gypsy people, thereby encouraging a critical reappraisal of their circumstances as well as new respect for their practical experience, cultural identity and traditional values. At the same time, we hope to promote respect for the written word, not for its own sake but as a means of enabling the community to decode and encode the world around them and society. For as a creative process, as an act of self-understanding, literacy aims ultimately at reducing the risk that a society's cultural identity can be manipulated, or that it will disappear altogether.

Based on these principles, the literacy campaign - which from the beginning has been under the direction of one of the social educators and a co-author of this report - has been and continues to be the most effective common thread linking and supporting the other aspects of the project. All of the other questions and issues, from health problems to difficulty finding employment, and all of the individual aspirations go to make up the universe of discourse brought forth in the literacy campaign. There everything is discussed and debated, mulled over and raised to the level of consciousness. Virtually all of the other activities of the project converge in the literacy classes, and from them flow many of its practical results. In the end, literacy training has played a crucial role in preparing the gypsies for the changes that are taking place within their community.

2. Studying the Community

The aims of research

In attempting to deal with an ethnic minority, and one which is a disadvantaged group to boot, we are entering a variable and complex area fraught with interconnecting social problems and cultural contrasts. One, moreover, in which it is essential to carry out applied and participatory research designed to serve at the same time as an innovative strategy in the qualitative transformation of the social practices of those who are serving as both researchers and subjects of research.

The following guidelines were formulated to ensure that such research is balanced:

- The need for quantitative, statistical studies;

- The opening of a dialogue intended to reveal how the gypsies see themselves and what it is that determines their actions, i.e. phenomenological analysis;

- Understanding of centres of social activity: in public services, shops, markets, fairs, etc.;

- Identification of community leaders and legitimate representatives that can serve as participants in the project;

- Obtaining of information from as many people as possible among those who deal directly or indirectly with the gypsies;

- The earliest possible involvement of the gypsies themselves in the project (so that they can be the protagonists of their own development), and delimitation of specific areas of interaction and commitment between members of the community and the field workers;

- During research, efforts would be made to create the right conditions (by disseminating ideas and proposing self-reliance) which would enable the community to develop the attitudes necessary to improve the lot of the gypsies.

As demonstrated in the above, our line of reasoning was to make the project participatory from the outset, and to ensure that the research phase is one of reflection/action. For making contact with the people in the community - even if only for information purposes - inevitably raises questions and leads to the establishment of informal ties, compromises and commitments: *He who questions is involved; he who responds is committed.*

Rationale and objectives of the study

By studying the community we hoped to obtain information and knowledge that would enable us to:

- Find rapid and effective solutions to a host of problems inherent in achieving balanced socio-economic development without upsetting the cultural framework of the gypsy community;

- Find comprehensive means for meeting the needs - actual or perceived - of the gypsy community, which is subject to enforced idleness while at the same time undergoing a process of change resulting from their insertion into the broader and dominant society that surrounds them;

- Identify and set overall objectives for the project;

- Identify priority sectors or areas of intervention taking into account the problems, needs and aspirations of the community and the resources available;

- Determine the objectives and field of activity of the various participants in the project;

- Identify the cultural and educational implications of community development work within an ethnic minority;

- Adjust the project strategy to the specific conditions among the gypsies and to their socio-cultural dynamics.

To accomplish these tasks, the following objectives were set for the community study stage of the project:

- To identify the main problems facing the community, in particular those relating to basic infrastructure;

- To identify needs that can be met through education;

- To learn what are the main aspirations expressed by the community;

- To understand the socio-economic and cultural organization of the community;

- To assess the psychological, ideological and cultural determinants of, and existing impediments to, the success of the project;

- To discover the collective interests of the community;

- To find out how the various groups in the community occupy their time in order to choose the best time of day, days and season in which to carry out the activities of the project;

- To determine the institutional framework within which the project would be carried out;

- To survey human support services and other resources;

- To choose a site for the project;

- To assess the importance which the gypsies attach to their lack of ability to read and write the language of the dominant society;

- To determine to what extent this lack of literacy causes difficulty in daily life;

- To evaluate their predisposition for learning/literacy, given the high level of illiteracy among them;

- To determine the failure or drop-out rate among the young and identify its causes.

Methodology used in the study

A plan was developed encompassing three phases:

1. Consult documents and records of the various services which have contact with the gypsy community;

2. Interview the people in charge of these services, as well as neighbours and the gypsies themselves;

3. First-hand observations.

1st phase
We began by ordering and analyzing all existing documents and records of the services that usually deal with the gypsy community (social security, municipal council, health services and primary schools). This entailed a great deal of red tape but with a little persistence we managed to compile a list of the community's needs.

2nd phase
While collecting the above-mentioned data, we were also interviewing those in charge of these institutions and any other employees who normally have direct contact with the gypsies.

We also interviewed the owners of the local grocery, butcher's shop and pharmacy, and everyone who lives in the surrounding area. In this way we learned the degree to which the gypsies are accepted in the community, how they are seen to behave and their relations with their neighbours, as well as identifying the natural leaders among them. This information facilitated direct contact and our introduction to the gypsy families.

Early on in our contact with the gypsies we discovered that it was not possible, in most cases, to conduct an "interview". Rather, we had to proceed in a normal conversational style with open questions, and allow the subject to take the response in any direction he/she chose. Often our questions elicited "life histories" which were rich in tradition and extremely useful.

We began by choosing for these informal interviews heads of family, all of them men and mostly elders of great prestige in the community. Meetings had to be arranged in advance as they were generally gone all day attending to sales at the fairs.

At first contact the gypsies are very reserved and distrustful. Little by little they will begin to accept a stranger, and once their confidence is gained they become open and loyal friends. At that point they are warmly receptive and attentive, and will even invite one into their homes. However, it took a year of assiduous courting to gain their complete confidence.

From the start we maintained a systematic scepticism whenever it appeared that the informant was capable of deceit.

Group discussions were more problematic, particularly at first. They became inhibited in the presence of other gypsies, avoiding our questions or diverting them into other areas. It appeared to us that a group psychology was operating, and that all of them were afraid to answer our questions. Once their confidence had been gained, however, the misgivings gradually disappeared and they became more open and consistently spontaneous.

3rd phase

It was first-hand observation which was most effective in giving us a real sense of their culture, their traditions and their psychology. We saw them at various times during their day-to-day activities, observing their family and group relations, and little by little we came to understand their *modus vivendi* and to change the negative preconceptions we had about this people. They invited us for coffee and for meals, and took us along to their weddings. We even observed their religious ceremonies.

In short, we came to know the people and accomplished our first objectives, and the project team was thus able to proceed with greater consistency and confidence in carrying out its tasks and interacting with the community. The knowledge gained enabled us to identify with greater precision what it was that had to be done, and to select the right strategy to be adopted.

We came to the conclusion that an approach of this type is not suited to large-scale projects or those that cover extensive areas; that it is entirely suited to a project centred on social problems; that it is most effect when dealing with qualitative rather than quantitative data; and that it is only possible where the necessary means are available, namely full-time staff.

3. The Gypsies

Socio-historical context

Little is known of the history of the gypsies of São Gregório (Braga). Their oral traditions and the lack of written documents prevent us from full investigation. Not even the oldest members of the community can tell us where they came from. Any memory they have of their forebears goes back no more than four generations, offering little hope of finding out their origin. They only know that their forefathers came very early on to settle first in Andalusia, Spain. However, the families that live in São Gregório originated more recently in various parts of Portugal, and no longer know of any Spanish relatives. According to them, they came to our country because they can live better and there are more social benefits here.

The São Gregório gypsy community initially consisted of 17 family groups totalling 94 inhabitants, with an average of 4/5 children per family. The situation is somewhat different now, with 23 family groups and 115 inhabitants.

They live in one-room huts with earthen or cement floors. The huts have electricity, but the only access to water is through communal taps. There is no sewer system and the only road into the community, which is situated at the top of Mount São Gregório, is a steep and difficult one.

Public transportation is available but the nearest stop is 750m from the community. There is a grocery store and butcher's shop approximately one kilometre away. They buy things on informal credit, to be paid when they receive their social security benefits.

The gypsies are essentially small businessmen, selling their wares in open-air stalls or as street vendors, and acting as horse traders. Some take temporary work as basket makers, but only when business is bad. The women assist their husbands and are housewives.

Despite their living conditions, some gypsy families are well off, having money, colour television sets, VCRs, washing machines, telephone, automobile, refrigerator, furniture. Most own cars as part of the cost of doing business, and not as symbols of wealth or prosperity.

At the same time, begging is an activity they can fall back on in times of crisis to obtain enough to survive. The women and infants engage in this activity. They often resort to social security for

subsistence, exaggerating their poverty and wearing more tattered clothes than usual.

Their health is always precarious and frequently at great risk. Their low income levels, poor living conditions and sanitation, lack of education and, especially, their life style lead to serious errors in the prevention or cure of illnesses. They have little protection from the elements (rain, cold, heat). They often sleep in the same clothes they wear during the day. Children go to bed and get up at the same time as the adult members of the family. They have no fixed meal times; they eat when they are hungry and have no idea of what constitutes a balanced diet. They drink a lot of coffee and eat a great deal of fatty pork. Children are raised primarily on potatoes.

The main diseases recorded among them are bronchitis, asthma, flu, colds, intestinal illnesses and psychiatric problems.

Children up to the age of five are most affected by disease. We learned this from the local clinic and hospital where we found that most of the prescriptions handed out had children's names on them. These children had not been vaccinated and did not have a regular pediatrician.

School attendance is poor among children and adults. Of the 27 school-age (6-14 years old) children in the community, only 14 go to school. The failure rate is close to 80% and attendance is very low.

There are many causes for the absenteeism and the poor pass rate including rejection on the part of most teachers, either as the result of culture shock or because of their appearance of neglect and (often) body odour. Allowed to run free at home, gypsy children have difficulty adjusting to schedules, rules and discipline in general. Their parents cannot help with their school work, which they find hard and time-consuming. Abstract knowledge holds little interest and has no practical application to the life they lead. When children turn 12 their parents are reluctant to allow them to go to school. The girls, in particular are tightly controlled once they reach the age of puberty.

In their intercultural relations with local and national institutions, the gypsies face two large difficulties. One is their status as a despised ethnic minority, and the other is their low level of education in the Portuguese language. About 80% of them are illiterate and another 10% read and write only with great difficulty. The gypsies felt little desire to learn these skills at first, but began

to come round as a result of our efforts to make them aware of the advantages of reading and writing. As a result, 23 adults signed up for our first literacy class, although in the event only 16 of them showed up.

Most of their free time is spent watching television, and by far their favourite programs are the Brazilian soap operas. They are also very fond of Indian films, virtually the only ones they watch. Their principal recreational activity is singing and dancing "in the Spanish style". They frequent festivals in their own and other communities, and are often seen at wedding celebrations, baptisms, dances and Christmas parties.

The gypsies of São Gregório speak *caló*, which is a dialect of Romany. The basic roots of this language are of Indian origin with some Greek additions and borrowings as well from Gallego, Portuguese, Catalan and French, in that order. Its grammar is heavily influenced by Spanish, which most of the older generation speak. All of the inhabitants speak Portuguese.

Their own language constitutes a sort of taboo, however, and is only used when others are not present. With us they always spoke Portuguese.

The gypsies' language is unwritten. For this reason, communication between them is either by telephone or by personal contact. To communicate with distant relatives they use intermediaries or public telephones. They put little trust in the written word, even in those rare cases where they are forced to rely on writing.

Their cultural heritage is transmitted orally and handed down from father to son within the family. A saying of theirs is that "one learns not by speaking but by listening". All of their traditions are passed along through stories and instructional narratives. The youngest among them learn and remember.

Forced to live submerged in foreign and more advanced cultures, unable to read and write their own language and surrounded by suspicion and rejection, the gypsies have internalized their marginalization/victimization, as a result of adverse social contacts and non-acceptance stemming from their being different and their status as a cultural minority. The constant pressure to which they are subjected has instilled in the gypsies a tenacious will to survive and has led them to develop different defence mechanisms to protect the original family nucleus.

These mechanisms usually manifest themselves in aggressive behaviour, distrust and intolerance - which serve only to widen the breach that separates the two societies they must deal with, and to increase their segregation.[2]

The psychology of the gypsy

The focal concern of the gypsies is their own subsistence. To them, thinking about what is past serves only to disturb the spirit. The future is uncertain - the only thing that counts is the present moment. Hence the gypsy lives day to day. When he feels a need, it must be satisfied immediately. If he must wait for it, the object of his desire loses its appeal.

The gypsies have no desire to get ahead, nor any sense of saving for the future. They possess little, have no wish to accumulate goods and do not envy others. They only work when they feel the need for money to survive. They have an aversion to working on a fixed schedule or in an enclosed space, and generally seek to avoid manual labour: "A gypsy does not dirty his hands".

Young men drafted into military service usually desert as they are unable to adjust to rules and discipline.

They are endowed with practical intelligence and have an intuitive grasp of things. At the same time, they believe in magic and accept the supernatural without critical thought.

They have difficulty concentrating and are fond of emotional display - the spectacular flourish that appeals to the emotions.

They value their freedom greatly, yet identify strongly with their group. They are never lacking in trust for each other, and generously share their food with their fellows.

They are famous for their gratitude for any favour, whether by a fellow gypsy or a *gadjé* (white).

They fear solitude (taking refuge in the family and the clan) and disease - making use of magic and resorting to witches and wizards who live nearby to fool the demons that cause their misfortunes.

Gypsies are fatalists: "sky above, earth below - and in the middle, the gypsies". This characteristic means that they accommodate easily to social problems and thus do not feel many of the needs inherent in our society.

The gypsy lives a happy and passionate life. He grasps life with both hands, yet is not afraid of death. Rather, he accepts it as his destiny with the phrase: "It is written".

The gypsies do not have a religion of their own and accept only with reluctance those of the countries in which they live. The gypsies of São Gregório have adopted the evangelical religion and are led by a pastor in religious services held in a local hut at 6 p.m. every day.

They are in fact very superstitious and it is our opinion that most do not know the difference between superstition and religion. They accept that religion which does them the most immediate good. The evangelical religion forbids certain attitudes and behaviour such as alcoholism, violence, bearing arms and the use of drugs. These were all problems in their community, especially among the young. Through religion they are trying to overcome delinquency, and they are succeeding. But their level of fanaticism, as well as their attendance at church, varies in direct proportion as the above problems wax and wane.

The gypsies have a primitive notion of theft. To rob a *gadjé* is perfectly acceptable. In fact, stealing is simply a means of subsistence made necessary by their way of life, their reluctance to accept regular work and the unreliable nature of their businesses. But among themselves stealing is prohibited.

Gypsy law is seen as prevailing over the established laws, and their own rules (always keeping one's word to another gypsy, extreme love for children, marital fidelity, respect for elders, fraternity and solidarity with the group, guarding a girl's virginity before marriage) are strictly obeyed.

They have a deep-felt love for their children, allowing them every possible freedom, saving the best food for them, giving loving care and protecting them from any harm.

They also have a fierce sense of fraternity and solidarity, despite the many arguments and fights between them - which, however, are invariably resolved without recourse to outside law. They defend each other fiercely and complain bitterly when one of their members is arrested, hospitalized or sought by the police.

When one goes to jail, the rest immediately band together and come to his defense, offering to pay fines, go bail or testify in his behalf. When a member is in hospital, they stay by his side, bring him food and make camp nearby. The same rallying takes place

when there is a funeral, which they see as an occasion to turn inward. All will pay their share for a member's funeral if the family cannot afford one.

Gypsy law is very demanding of its womenfolk, especially in matters of love, honour and privacy. Young girls are virtually betrothed from birth, and are zealously guarded by parents and brothers once they reach puberty. A gypsy woman is expected to marry once only and in church, to be faithful to her husband and to remain a perpetual widow should he die. She must also be hard-working, bear children (it is considered a curse to be childless) and avoid showing legs or knees.

The family

The family is one of the pillars of gypsy society. Not just the nuclear family (parents and children) but an extended group, which includes several nuclear families related by blood. This extended family ends at the level of the clan, which is a single organism in its social actions. The clan, in turn, relates to other groups with which it is related to make up a tribe or community.

Authority within the clan increases with age, so that it is generally the elders who organize tasks, give orders and take important decisions.

But the "chief" of the clan is not necessarily the oldest individual. For in addition to age, there are other factors to be considered in the choice of leader: prestige, money, experience in general, number of sons and relatives, connections with the outside world. The tasks of a "chief" can range from financial matters and relations with the dominant society, to settling minor disputes between members of the clan that the *batós* [father/head of family] cannot resolve.

Within the nuclear family, the father is the authority figure but he is primarily preoccupied with business outside the home. As he reaches an advanced age, he leaves these responsibilities to his sons.

Marriage itself is not the beginning of the family; it is simply a rite of passage from young man to adult. After his marriage, a son continues to be dependent upon his father and works to repay him for the wedding expenses. A young married woman (*bori*) passes into the family of her husband and is subordinate to her mother-in-law.

Only with the birth of their first child does the husband become a man and the wife achieve full stature as a woman. At that moment a new nuclear family is created.

A gypsy woman's lot is one of subjugation. When single, she is dependent on her father and brothers; once married, she must obey her husband. Her mate has the exclusive right to inflict any punishment on his wife who is considered weak and inferior. The role of the woman in gypsy society is summed up in their stark social hierarchy: "the aged, children, men, women, animals".

On the day of their marriage, young women must undergo "virginity testing" which is carried out by an older woman who specializes in this art, in the presence of the mothers of the future bride and bridegroom, plus godmothers and other respected female elders.

The wedding ceremony itself is usually in late afternoon during the warmer months so that it can be held in the open air. It is a time when extended families reunite - usually the families of the couple invite all of their relatives, friends and neighbours.

It is on these occasions that the elders get together and make long-term plans for future marriages.

Today, however, the gypsies want to be free to choose their own mate, so that it is not uncommon for a pair of young gypsies to elope when their parents disapprove.

Elopement is in fact traditional among the gypsies. The young couple does not go far, however, returning in a matter of days - sometimes hours - to beg the forgiveness of both sets of parents. This is almost always given, and the young couple are allowed to live together until their marriage can be formalized with a wedding ceremony.

If, externally, the gypsies have altered their ways and adopted many of the cultural habits of their surroundings, the same cannot be said of their traditional family structure or their basic psychology and ideology, which they have managed to perpetuate in their culture despite constant pressure from the cultures of those societies that surround them.

4. Implementation of the Project

The overall objective

Having attained this minimum level of knowledge of the community and characterization of its inhabitants; having identified their problems, needs and desires - from their standpoint as well as from our own; having assessed their socio-economic and cultural level, we turned to defining the type of intervention to be carried out, taking as our guiding principle the idea that individuals have the potential to change and to participate in transforming the means of their socialization.

Rejecting the use of charity, we chose instead to lead the gypsies to discover the causes of the problems that afflict them, so that in the light of these problems, they themselves - both as gypsies and as Portuguese citizens - could seek the best solutions. "If a man asks for a fish, give him instead a fishing pole and teach him how to fish." This in a nutshell is what we have sought in our project.

The gypsies are aware of their poverty, their low standard of living. They know that living is more than merely surviving. They know of no other way to improve their lives than to beg, but this "solution" only increases their dependence at every level.

This was what we wanted to change. Not to deprive them of their legitimate civil rights, but to train them in other means of improving their lot, or at least help them find other ways to earn their living which both respect their nature and retain their dignity as human beings.

The team of field workers did not root out some of the gypsies' convictions which had not been expressed at the start, but these came out eventually after some consciousness-raising efforts and much questioning.

The overall objective of the Social Development Project as worked out in cooperation with participating members of social agencies can be broken down as follows:

- To ensure that all family units have access to adequate housing, and that they know how to take care of it;

- To help the gypsy community be less dependent upon social service benefits;

- To improve their employment situation and wages;

- To provide the camp with basic sanitation;

- To ensure minimum standards of hygiene, both for individuals and for the community as a whole;

- To create a standard of living acceptable to the surrounding (non-gypsy) community, so as to avoid social marginalization of the gypsies;

- To promote the integration of the gypsies into the mainstream of Portuguese society along their own cultural lines;

- To make the surrounding community aware of the cultural idiosyncrasies of the gypsies;

- To change the negative and strongly-embedded stereotype of the gypsies within the new Portuguese society;

- To create links between the gypsy community and the society which surrounds them - links which respect their differences.

Plus the following which relate to their schooling:

- To reduce basic and functional illiteracy among the community's adult population;

- To bring down absentee and failure rates among school-age children;

- To promote family participation in the education of their children;

- To encourage a flexible and varied approach in the school system at social and institutional levels alike.

Methodology of the study-action project

To attain the objectives proposed, a number of different entities were called upon to coordinate their efforts. In order to respond to the

variety of problems perceived in the community, it was necessary to develop a unified approach in which their several efforts would converge in achieving the total success of the project.

To this end we contacted and eventually obtained the participation of the following institutions: the Municipal Council of Braga, the Health Centre, the Employment and Vocational Training Institute, the School Extension Program (Adult Education Division), the Sports Directorate, the Manufacturers Association of Minho, the Social Security Office and the Portuguese Red Cross.

The broad outlines of the project's context contained many elements indicating what methodology should be adopted in a study-action project of this sort. It would be mainly concerned with pointing out differences, since in carrying out the project only explanations - not generalizable knowledge - of what was studied would be produced (this was compatible with the nature of the project). Its field of interaction was compact and limited: its activities would concentrate on social problems, attempting to change practices and thereby alter the social context of the gypsy community and its intercultural contacts. Participants were available from social agencies serving the community to act as animators in promoting cultural activities. We were confident that the actual contents of the project could be worked out and formulated as problems arose and made themselves known. A team of full-time field workers had been appointed to work on the project, and financial and material resources were at hand.

But, on the other hand, we knew that the study-action method is both complicated and demanding, and is not fully compatible with the difficulties and limitations foreseen. It is a method which can only be applied by a multidisciplinary team which includes diverse specialists not available to us (sociologists, psychologists, educational experts, etc.). The contracts with local cooperators who would help carry out the project had to be in writing (the method does not allow verbal contracts), and yet our counterparts in the community were not in a position to sign these. The method assumes that everything has been negotiated in advance, that whenever strategies have to be changed, new contracts can be made redefining the commitment and recording the changes. This we could not do. It would require that the theory behind it be developed at the same time as the project is being carried out, and we knew that we did not have the capability to do this. It would presuppose a degree of

control that we feared could not be provided at all times. At the same time, there are many intangible aspects of the community that are complex and unknown, and that create a chasm between the team of field workers and social service cooperators, on the one hand, and the members of the community, on the other hand, so that we could not predict exactly the degree of participation we would receive from our counterparts within the gypsy community.

Changing social practices implies disturbing the thought processes of the community, and in view of earlier references to this sort of phenomenon we could not be sure that we might not unleash adverse effects. Aware of our limitations, we were afraid that we might not be able to control these.

In view of the above, yet recognizing the advantages of this method - tighter control of results and greater scientific rigour, stronger commitment and higher level of participation and involvement by local cooperators - we opted for compromise. We would attempt to apply the method's stages and procedures, but in a more flexible and less bureaucratic manner.

Consequently, the methodological orientation adopted included the following objectives:

- Using the direct experience and daily life of the gypsy community, to stimulate the thought processes and engagement of the participants toward changes rooted in both personal and collective experience and requiring systematic study of the medium/ community;

- To set the operation within the study/action methodology, combining its stages and phases with social dynamic principles, attitudes and procedures;

- To promote participation or involvement in the form of initiative and commitment as a means of articulating knowledge, skills and attitudes;

- To formulate plans for bringing about economic and technical improvements, including consideration of the means (human and institutional resources) and repercussions of the decisions taken;

- To devise means for integrating the action of public and private institutions and services on behalf of the community in carrying out the project activities;

- To design the project so as to include a wide range of activities (training, creativity and recreation) and technical measures (diverse resources: written, oral, audiovisual and other materials);

- To aim at systematic (and systemic) intervention not restricted to practical applications only. To do this it was necessary to balance the following levels of the project:

  - regular and continuous contact with the community
  - classification and study (assessment) of previous projects and experiments
  - study and basic research for the training of agents, systematic organization of the materials and tools used in the project

- To get the community involved in its socio-economic organization, bearing in mind its cultural roots and tradition as a source of regeneration;

- To encourage expression and participation (recreation, festivals, research, artistic creation, cultural interaction, preservation of heritage and the environment, local radio, sports, etc.);

- To promote solidarity and social support programs (aimed at children, the elderly, disease prevention, the handicapped, illiterates, etc.);

- To foster action groups (parent-teacher associations, neighbourhood programs, renters, consumers, etc.);

- To secure the help of local and regional governments as an essential condition for success;

- To decentralize control and encourage initiative and autonomy, avoiding the formality and uniformity inherent in central controls.

Strategies to be carried out

Following the negotiations with institutional participants, a plan was worked out (it would be unrealistic to say it was "agreed" since nothing was in writing and everything depended on verbal agreements). The various services agreed to cooperate by making their personnel and support materials available so long as they were used in accordance with the rules governing their operations and duties.

The project was divided into three stages so as to make its introduction gradual, always subject to readjustments or changes in its basic strategies.

The Adult Education Division played an important role because of its experience in programs for the disadvantaged, its capacity for stimulating self-awareness, and the assumption that illiteracy was a major stumbling block to success in school. Another key element in the equation was the fact that one of the young social educators appointed to the team had been trained in adult education, primarily in literacy programs. She was thus fully informed and prepared to direct a course of this nature within the context of a community action program. In the first stage of the project, then, she was kept busy working as social educator and at the same time developing the literacy course.

In developing this course, she was able to explore issues and expand into areas which the respective social services are not prepared or equipped to tackle within specific community action programs: the environment, consumer awareness, women's issues, the law (two young gypsy men had recently been arrested in São Gregório for drug trafficking).

As part of the effort to ensure that the efforts of the various services did not take place in isolation and would not simply disappear the moment the project ended, the literacy program took on an integrative role by organizing its teaching materials around these issues and frequently expanding its scope to include activities outside the usual school curriculum.

The Health Centre took the lead in the area of personal and collective hygiene, as well as diet, children's vaccination programs and family planning. It was also instrumental in involving family physicians and making the gypsy community aware of the need to consult them.

The literacy program took on all of these topics and, using an interdisciplinary approach, worked to inculcate these ideas and make them a part of the new awareness which the gypsies were developing of their community.

The Municipal Council took on the task of ensuring that the gypsies had decent living quarters, primarily by building several houses and upgrading their shacks, installing sanitation and carrying out negotiations aimed at regularizing ownership of the area where they live. Their shacks are located on private - albeit not very valuable - land. It was proposed that the project buy the land for them, and the Council has offered to seek favourable conditions for its acquisition.

The literacy program brought up for discussion many topics that were then extended throughout the community and roused many people to action. By means of this course, solutions were worked out, means of carrying out these solutions were devised and subsequently adopted by the head of the community, and the necessary documents and requirements were prepared with the help of the animator.

An agreement was reached under which the Employment Institute (Ministry of Labour) tried to help those gypsies who successfully completed the literacy program to find their first jobs.

The business of operating street markets is becoming increasingly difficult and some members of the community have begun to express the desire to find regular employment as electricians, mechanics, drivers or night watchmen. However, there is virtually no chance that this will happen since they lack the employers' confidence and any tradition of working at "normal" jobs; do not exactly subscribe to the work ethic (they are said to look for employment without work); and have a very low level of education. The only other possibility would be for them to find positions in the construction industry. They tried this but quickly quit because the work is hard, and because the gypsies look down on manual labour in general. Accordingly, the Employment Institute has so far been unable to place them and never having worked they are ineligible for unemployment benefits.

Still on the topic of employment, the literacy course also showed that there is a need to provide pre-employment preparation within a socio-educational setting. To this end the Adult Educational Service of Braga, with the support of the European Social Fund, introduced

two training programs of the sort needed: a sewing and dressmaking class for women and an electrician's course for men. Those who attended these classes obtained a sort of semi-qualification which helped them gain access to jobs; this shows that they were beginning to feel the need to overcome the idleness that was part of their life style. At the same time, the women who participated learned a few techniques that enabled them to improve their quality of life by mending their own and their children's clothes, and making a few new articles using available resources. In this way too, they were able to contribute to family income.

Another innovation within the community was a multidisciplinary work group called the Leisure Time Activities Group (ATL) which included both children and adults, and which acted as another focal point for various actions and levels of community participation.

It was decided that priority would be given to activities directed at children in this program, since they represent the best segment of society in which to begin - from the standpoint both of influencing their behaviour and of possible multiplier effects. On the other hand, their parents are in some circumstances more susceptible to change.

In planning these activities, we began by researching studies carried out under the Educational Support for Gypsy Children Program of the Ministry of Education in various locations around the country.

In addition to the pedagogical difficulties themselves, the poor adjustment of gypsy children to school, on the one hand, and the failure of teachers to understand their cultural differences or to accept their habits and manner of thinking, on the other, were the biggest obstacles.

It was decided that the program should concentrate on preparing the children for beginning and staying in school, encouraging parents to take an active role in their children's schooling, and making teachers more sensitive to, and understanding of, their cultural differences.

The first step was to define the areas in which activities were to be carried out. For this it was necessary to understand what motivates gypsy children and which skill development to take as a model for stimulating their interest in school.

The teachers who carried out the above-mentioned studies had thought about this and made recommendations on how to integrate gypsy children into the school system:

- Make parents aware of the importance of their cooperation with the schools;
- Create pre-school or kindergarten groups to make later adaptation to school easier;
- Develop support and remedial activities, particularly in the initial stages of school programs;
- Develop both oral and linguistic skills so as to enrich their vocabulary;
- Set up and support sports activities;
- Organize courses for teaching staff on the culture and ways of the gypsies;
- Promote literacy among their parents;
- Develop self-sufficiency in the children who have lived over-protected lives with their families.

Plans were included for activities to overcome the problems they encounter with the work and the difficulties they have integrating into the school system, while at the same appealing to their known interests: keen enjoyment of music, dance and theatre; strong attraction in the plastic arts, for which they show real ability, skill and balance; and enthusiasm for sports and games.

The activities developed and presented in the program were intended essentially to create the necessary conditions for successful adaptation of the gypsy children to the school system (the results are increasingly positive), to get parents involved and make them aware of their children's education (benefiting their own training as well), and assisting the teachers to become more aware and receptive of these children in their schools.

School support activities were organized. In addition to extra-curricular help with their other school work, activities were carried out involving manual training: wood, clay and straw. These activities involving motor skills and creativity fascinated them, and contributed much to motivating them and keeping them involved in the schools.

Verbal skills in language were developed through various topics which were taken up in school wherever possible, presented in films, slides and other teaching methods, especially games, songs and dramatic presentations.

Various lessons on personal hygiene were taught, including bathing and washing. These activities helped to form good habits and encouraged within the gypsy children the desire to keep themselves clean, above all in school, and helped ensure their acceptance by teaching staff and other non-gypsy children.

Sports activities were carried out every week with the help of the Sports Directorate: track and field, handball and soccer. At present the children are getting to know the parish by taking part in a brush-clearing project. Most activities take place on a borrowed sports field and are directed by the project's cultural animator. This summer the children are going to compete in their own small championships and tournaments.

They have also been taken on excursions to visit museums, exhibits, shows, the circus, etc. for recreational and educational purposes. They have been to the nation's capital, Lisbon, where they stayed for five days and saw the zoo, monuments and museums. They have also visited the university town of Coimbra where they went to see the show *Portugal dos Pequeninos*, always a delight for children. They have toured Gerês National Park, a brick factory in Barcelos, a print shop and a newspaper. They went to this with a view to starting their own neighbourhood newspaper. They also had a full tour of a vocational school so that they could begin to think about possible future job training. The purpose of these activities, of which only a few have been mentioned, is to broaden their horizons, let them learn about the country and its natural and cultural patrimony, and to let them have fun.

Week-long holiday outings to the beach were organized and represented the first time most gypsy children had ever been away from their parents. At first they were disconcerted at the daily routines to which they were not accustomed: set hours for getting up and going to bed, regular meal times, use of bedclothes. After

two or three days they settled down to the routine. This was their first step towards independence from their parents - and it was also the first proof of the community's confidence in the project personnel who accompanied the group of children.

Special events were planned for World Children's Day, Environment and Consumer Awareness Week, International Literacy Day, etc. During these times, the special topics were taken up with the children in the ATL Group, and with adults attending the literacy course. Various activities were carried out producing various items (posters, pamphlets, photographs, etc.) for display at the end of the special day or week.

Christmas, Carnival and St. John's Day festivals were held in which the gypsies took an active part, accepting assignments and helping with dances, sing-alongs, and even short skits. Despite the fact that these were alien celebrations to them, the gypsies took part with enthusiasm and real enjoyment. They have absorbed much of Spanish and Portuguese culture as can be seen in their costumes and rituals. Helping out in these festivals provided good motivation for them. Together they planned events, organized and arranged for appropriate locations, prepared food and, under the supervision of the project staff, put on small plays or skits - often nothing more than the dramatization of an anecdote or funny episode that had happened, and more than once with a *gadjé* or non-gypsy as the butt of the joke.

Exchanges were organized with ATL Groups in other (non-gypsy) communities, together with adult exchanges with other literacy courses in order to take part in each other's activities and festivals. The purpose of these exchanges was to promote intercultural relations and mutual acceptance, as well as to demystify the gypsies. Events were planned which would promote the cultures of those involved, and included plays, popular music, regional dance and folklore festivals. The gypsies were generally reluctant to mix with non-gypsies - nor were they the only ones to show such reluctance! But they listened attentively, laughed and enjoyed themselves. By the end of the social events (generally they ended with the serving of refreshments), the gypsies were more relaxed and were easily coaxed into singing and dancing to flamenco music.

Practical courses in cooking for women and basketmaking for men are planned, although they have not yet begun. In line with the other training they are receiving, the cooking classes are designed

essentially to teach the women how to prepare low-cost meals. The basketmaking course is intended to give the men one possible avenue of self-employment as an alternative to the street market trade which has fallen on hard times. The gypsies have few other employment opportunities. Lacking both education and trade qualifications, and with their poor reputation as workmen (partly because of the racial stigma), they are unlikely to find an employer willing to hire them. Until they can improve their image, self-employment appears to be the best way to counteract the threat to their street market operations.

One method adopted to help salvage their historical identity and their culture was to help both the children and adult members of the community create family albums. These would contain photographs from as far back as possible, life histories, stories and instructional narratives that have come down to them and are part of their cultural patrimony and oral tradition to be appreciated and preserved. They became very interested and worked hard on this activity, gaining new respect for their social and cultural inheritance. Seeing this effort to reconstruct their family histories, even though sometimes without success, made them aware of the importance of recording traditions so as to ensure that these are preserved for handing down to future generations. Compiling these albums is a difficult task and many may never in fact be completed since the gypsies have no writing and many details may have been lost forever along the byways travelled by this people.

A workshop on gypsy culture was held in one of the area's primary schools, and all teachers who deal with children from the community were invited. Once again we noted the general intolerance and lack of comprehension on the part of the teaching staff, and how this leads to racist behaviour which contributes to the failure of children to adapt.

This initiative represented an effort to give the teachers insight into the world of the gypsies, to get them to understand the key elements of the other culture and, hopefully, reexamine their actions in the classroom. The ultimate objective was to make the teachers aware and give them practice in redefining and adapting teaching materials which take into account the cultural differences. It was suggested that coordination be set up between the school and the São Gregório Project, and that the teachers could organize intercul-

tural activities as part of a school project involving teachers and both gypsy and non-gypsy students and parents.

As part of the workshop, a gypsy couple was invited to speak about their culture, their experience with their own children's schooling, and their feelings about the school's failure to understand their socio-economic and cultural situation.

It is worth noting here that we who are in daily contact with the gypsy children in the ATL have an altogether different impression of them than most of the teachers. They are above all sincere in everything and, not understanding the way things are organized, they react strongly when provoked - behaviour which is generally interpreted as rebelliousness or impertinence. They have a strong and determined character; they are clever and intelligent, although their abilities have not been developed. They learn quickly provided the right teaching methods are used. They are obedient when they understand the reason for the things they are told to do. They are affectionate and loving (despite the close relationship with their parents, they are not used to open displays of affection). To gain their trust, one has to establish the kind of relationship that will exist from the very first day.

Methodological aspects

It is not easy to distinguish between project activities aimed at adults and those for children. For in the event they became completely intertwined, with the adults taking part in the activities intended for children and the latter often attending the adult literacy classes (to the benefit of their school work). This was not the way the project was designed; rather, it sprang from the dynamics of the community itself.

On the one hand, the gypsies' natural affinity for their children means that they want to keep them close, or at least to know what they are doing. And on the other hand, many mothers took their children with them to their own adult classes.

Not that this method - which was forced on us - did not have its positive side. As it turned out, often the best way to get to the parents was through their children.

In the beginning we approached issues gingerly, afraid of offending their sensitivities and losing the confidence of the gypsies. Later, when an air of confidence had been established, those who

worked with the gypsies began to change their roles and the way they approached tasks. They realized that it was often necessary to be tough and openly critical, virtually scolding them, to get results.

One thing was crystal clear: with the gypsies it is necessary to set definite rules from the start, and both to follow them oneself and insist that they do likewise. Another obvious conclusion was that, in our first contacts, the natural defensiveness of the gypsies led them to attempt to make fun of the "outsiders", acting distant, suspicious and even hostile at times. However, as soon as they felt secure and confident, this attitude was replaced by natural friendliness and hospitality. Once they decided you were a friend, they were loyal friends indeed, even asking for and accepting advice readily, and acting on it without qualms.

It was never the intention that the people taking part in the project should remain neutral. The nature and the reality of the situation we hoped to change were virtually unknown; and we were aware that the better we came to know the community, the problems they faced and their reactions, the more likely it would be that we would have to change and adopt new strategies. It was also difficult to predict how involved the members of the community would become in the project.

Therefore, it was clear from the start that flexibility and adaptability would be the order of the day, as staff responded to circumstances and adjusted to the reactions of the gypsies.

Many different strategies were used in carrying out the activities, some of them mentioned above. Wherever possible (although with moderation), audiovisual materials were used. Great care was taken in selecting these to ensure the right type of message, form of presentation and selection of images, so as to ensure that they could be easily understood and decoded. Posters were prepared to raise the gypsies' awareness, provide information and publicize the materials. Talks and debates in the form of open discussions were organized with guest specialists in the various areas of interest. Work is going on now to produce a community newsletter to come out every three months. The purpose of this publication is to promote the gypsy culture and provide information on the project for exchange with other gypsy and non-gypsy communities and other similar projects.

The newsletter is to be divided into three sections: one for articles and stories relating to project personnel; one for gypsy reaction to project activities including their experiences, needs and

aspirations, and their own stories and legends; and one for news items of interest to members of the community and to those running activities for children.

One way or another everyone in the community is involved, especially a group of young people who will have the main responsibility for putting out each issue.

Everything was done at each stage to involve as many members of the community as possible in the activities, either through their representatives or through direct contacts with those in charge of activities. The details of activities were worked out by the participants themselves. In the literacy courses, the organization, contents and methods used - even class schedules - were decided by common accord. Husbands invariably accompanied their wives to family planning sessions. Parents went along with their children to doctor appointments and for vaccinations. And women participated in anti-smoking and anti-alcoholism activities.

5. **Difficulties and Conditions Encountered**

It was expected from the outset that the project would have difficulties to overcome. At the very beginning, the problem was lack of knowledge about the gypsies and their circumstances. Little was known about their social dynamic or the functioning of their traditions. We were not even sure how they would react to the activities carried out under the project.

We began with notions gathered from reading, plus the common preconceptions about gypsies. We found that many of these were false impressions very far removed from reality.

At the start, before they realized how the project was to work in the community, the attitude of the gypsies was akin to begging. They wanted - indeed demanded - that they be given what they needed, claiming they were entitled to this and showing no interest whatever in the project being proposed and in fact scoffing at it. It was difficult to make them see that only they could secure, by their own initiative, what was required not only for their subsistence but to better their living standards.

This tendency to beg was most obvious when the Minister of Education visited the literacy class. On his arrival, all of the gypsies in the community crowded into the hut where the classes were held

and began to recount a long litany of complaints about the way they live, all the services they don't receive, etc. and made endless requests for assistance in areas outside the Minister's competence. However, they did obtain promises of a proper building in which to hold the literacy classes, plus several other items of interest to the community.

On the other hand, several of the barriers to change were difficult to overcome. Among those remaining, the most problematic cultural obstacles are:

- Tradition in general continues to resist change, so that only certain utilitarian accommodations were possible. A few external changes resulted from the contact between cultures (clothing, housing, food), which they recognize as being to their advantage.

- Lack of education and illiteracy continue to be cruelly oppressive, and it was noted that it is the new generation with at least some schooling that is trying to break down the barriers of tradition.

- Cultural ethnocentrism - the belief in the superiority of one's own culture - plus fear of losing face among their fellows, prevents the gypsies from replacing traditional behaviour with what are deemed foreign customs.

- The solidarity of the clan means that each one feels he/she is an integral part of the group and is prevented by peer pressure from accepting changes that may be interpreted as being a traitor to the community.

- The family structure is such that their cultural values are zealously protected and any attempt to change these is viewed with resentment and almost always rejected.

- Their provincialism and lack of initiative means that the gypsies will do little to improve their living standard and socio-economic status.

- Communication (in both directions) was an obstacle to establishing relationships with the gypsies at the beginning. They are not fluent in Portuguese, so they had trouble understanding us and

> were none too clear when trying to use our language. At times, they intentionally used *caló* among themselves to criticize the program or talk about us without being understood, or sometimes to deceive us.

This latter problem has been partly solved, as those working directly with the gypsies, although still far from fluent, have learned a few words and phrases in their language.

There were other problems having nothing to do with the gypsies, such as lack of agreement between public services, which did nothing to make our job any easier.

In Portugal, public service institutions traditionally have a strictly vertical relationship with their clients. In general they are not prepared to give specific responses, especially to minorities. They have rules and procedures to follow which are fairly rigid and unbending.

Because of the diversity of its field of action and the general philosophy of the institution, the Social Security Office was, from the beginning, willing to break with this tradition and take part in a cooperative effort to provide training and upgrade their socio-economic status. It developed specific projects, cut through red tape, applied rules flexibly, and formed special work teams to help the gypsies. Coordination with the School Extension Program was excellent as well, and the attitude of this organization was, from the start, in sharp contrast to the remaining institutions with which the project had to deal. The diversity of backgrounds of its students and their different needs already required flexibility and adaptability, so that its officials were very helpful. However, it lacks the material, human and financial resources necessary to respond to all the requests made of it.

The policies of certain institutions regarding their duties and regulations gave rise to confrontations with the members of the project. Their lack of vocation in this area, particularly when dealing with minority groups, and the little experience they possessed in training programs, led to the adoption of strategies not always in accord with the objectives of the project. There was also the problem of lack of continuity in their activities, which sometimes resulted in ad hoc solutions. In the end we were able to fill these gaps using other strategies as mentioned earlier.

There was also a noticeable divergence in the educational principles espoused by the Extension Program staff who devised the literacy courses and the officials from the Social Security Office. Despite the specific training in the social aspects of adult education which the extension people receive, they tend to restrict their view of the learning situation to student/teacher/classroom; whereas the Social Service workers take a wider view of the social context and concentrate on interpersonal relationships, which are influenced by the subject's place in his environment. These misunderstandings were taken in our stride and worked out by the staff in joint meetings and planning sessions for organizing the activities.

Institutional rules and bureaucracy also hindered progress under the project, as well as a general lack of human resources and a reduction in financial support.

Lack of a suitable site with at least minimum facilities was another difficulty we faced. The literacy course was held in a run-down shack with poor lighting and a leaky roof, making it generally uncomfortable for everyone. Teaching materials and students' work could not be put on the walls. The shack was so cramped that students had to huddle together at two small desks. Children had to take turns sitting on worn-out benches as their mothers came to the classes in shifts. The path to the shack was difficult, winding and muddy.

The teachers complained about the poor conditions and the effect they had on the course. Indeed, only enormous goodwill, immense sacrifice and much courage made it possible to carry on under such adverse conditions.

The first signs of change

We begin by noting the construction of a bathhouse consisting of four toilets and four shower units, now ready for use. Also nearing completion is the pavilion building which will house a number of activities. The following sections list other results obtained under the project.

Health

The children have been vaccinated. At present, mothers are taking their children for their booster shots. Moreover, they are making the appointments themselves.

All the gypsies have been registered with family medicine clinics and the number of visits are increasing. Several referrals to ophthalmology, dentistry, neuro-pediatrics and psychology have been made. Teams of pediatric physicians visit the school on a regular basis to carry out child health programs.

Changes in eating habits are slowly making themselves felt: the children drink more milk than before and are bringing lunches to school more often. In general, they seem to be trying to arrange a more balanced diet.

Use of tobacco has not changed. It seems there are powerful cultural values attached to this habit. The men affirm their manhood by smoking, so children begin to smoke while still in school. At least we can be sure that the gypsies are now aware of the dangers of smoking and drinking.

Most of the women now practice family planning with the consent of their husbands and only after having at least one child. They have put aside their preconceptions and are now open to trying different methods of contraception, even the most radical types. As a result the birth rate is just beginning to register a slight drop.

Housing

Not much has changed in this area. Some huts now have cement floors, and a few people have reinforced their roofs with plastic.

The gypsies are giving more attention to the arrangement of their living space. Many have split their one room into several areas using curtains or wooden partitions in a attempt to obtain more privacy.

Employment

Here too the results are not very significant. Several have applied for their first jobs and are awaiting an answer.

A request to have the Employment and Vocational Training Institute create a class for automotive mechanics was rejected. The regulations of the institution do not permit training courses for persons with a very low level of education.

Personal and group hygiene

The gypsies are now taking more care with their personal hygiene and clothes, and are cleaner in appearance. The common area of the community is cleaner and garbage is not simply tossed out, but is stored in bags and kept tidy.

Maintenance of the bathhouse is the responsibility of the community and the chief collects the fee from everyone to pay for water, electricity and gas. Up to now such an arrangement would have been unthinkable - their attitude would have been that the institution building the unit should be responsible for its upkeep, not the community.

Children's education

The gypsies are becoming increasingly concerned with their children's education. As a result, the relationship between the school and the gypsy community has improved. Parents are more concerned and now go to the school on occasion to make sure their children are attending and to find out if there are any problems. The project staff started this practice, but the gypsies are now continuing it on their own. Parents, and especially mothers, now participate in school activities.

Changes are being noted in the instruction the gypsies give to their children, e.g. with regard to stealing from the *gadjé*.

School situation

During the 1989/90 school year, the failure rate among gypsy children dropped by 25% (at the start of the project it had stood at 80%).

That year the school was fortunate to obtain the services of a young teacher who understood the problems faced by gypsy children and tried a new teaching method aimed at producing an intercultural school. She established links between the school and the parents' group, and opened a dialogue attempting to understand their way of thinking, their concept of learning and even their aspirations for their children. She managed to create a more welcoming atmosphere, made the teaching/learning process more attractive for them and gave them the needed motivation. In short, she brought a new dynamism to the school, setting an example for her colleagues and creating an open atmosphere of acceptance for the children.

However, for administrative reasons she was replaced near the end of the school year and her departure had an immediate effect on the behaviour and performance of the gypsy children. This year (1990/1991) the failure rate is expected to jump by around 50%. The new teachers do not know how to maintain the dynamism that was beginning to be created in the school. The children and the

community alike have a low opinion of them and have not accepted them.

The awareness created among teachers, the activities carried out in the school, the encouragement of the gypsy children and the changes in their behaviour, as well as the responsible attitude being taken by parents - all are in danger of being lost by the end of the school year.

Literacy courses

With regard to the adult program, the question is of an altogether different order and a linear analysis is not possible.

It seems likely that faced with their growing concern with their children's education, the adult gypsies have begun wondering about their own lack of schooling and asking themselves to what point this has affected the schooling of their children. It is also possible that this thought has awakened their interest and their awareness of the need to be able to read and write the language of their country - an area in which their own children are beginning to outstrip them.

Clearly there are other factors at work in their decision: the consciousness-raising effort to which they were exposed, concern for employment, and the need to obtain a driver's licence and apply to various social institutions.

One thing, however, has certainly been established: they have the desire to learn. This is clearly seen in the fact that they come back year after year to the literacy courses.

In 1988/89, there were 16 people in the course; in 1989/90 this went up to 23 adults; and in 1990/91 there were only 8 gypsies in attendance despite the fact that 18 had signed up. The teacher opted to work with smaller groups in order to give more individualized instruction. The gypsies require a great deal of attention since they generally have a very low level of education and need much extra help. Larger groups do not allow enough individual attention, nor are the teaching methods appropriate to larger groups very successful with the gypsies.

Often they are not able to attend because of their work (for example, when they attend fairs far from the community) and may drop out as a result. At times they simply stop coming, and then show up some time later saying that they were simply tired of studying!

This had a direct effect on the results obtained. Progress was very slow and this led to much disappointment.

It is difficult to give a quantitative assessment which will provide a realistic view of the progress made and the successes achieved in the course. To date twelve gypsies have obtained their first level certificates (equivalent to successful completion of the first four years of primary school). Meanwhile, many other gypsies have learned how to read with some facility, and others can no longer be said to be illiterate in the Portuguese language.

The real evaluation of the literacy program remains to be carried out in the broader context where the results of their achievements can be judged in other than academic measurements.

6. **Continuation of the Project**

It is now three years since the project began and the first two stages have been completed. The first stage (research and study of the community) is in fact ongoing in the sense that it is always open to adjustment. The second stage (planning, execution and assessment) was characterized by disorder resulting from two phenomena: the conflict created by the confrontation between the ethnic characteristics of the gypsies and the challenges and stimulation to which they were exposed; and the changes required in altering habits, dress and behaviour.

The third stage of the project (transition) will be characterized by assimilation and internalization of the knowledge, skills and attitudes released in the earlier stages.

It is hoped that the gypsies will develop and reorganize parts of their experience, retaining those elements of our culture that are of immediate use to them, and that help in their adaptation to the socio-economic environment in which they find themselves. The aim is not to replace the aspects typical of their culture with elements from our own. Rather, we hope for gradual change that will allow for improvement of their standard of living, without losing sight of the need to preserve their cultural characteristics and to safeguard their originality.

Our participatory research and close direct contact with this community for almost three years has helped us to reach the conclusions outlined below.

Effective assimilation of the gypsy in our society will be inversely proportional to the amount of force applied. This assimilation will take place slowly over a long period as a result of the impact made by the advantages and demands of the dominant society, which the gypsies will be obliged to accept simply in order to survive. Previous experience has shown that attempts more or less to impose automatic integration on a minority such as this will have the effect of creating small pockets of culturally static individuals resistent to all efforts at change.

The motivation for change will grow stronger in direct proportion to the number of items that are borrowed and successfully adapted to their cultural values and aspirations. For the gypsies, the strongest motivation or stimulus for change comes from, among other things, the desire for status, the wish to obtain the material conditions that will ensure their survival, and to better their economic situation; but above all, the hope that they can provide a safer and happier future for their children.

Literacy and schooling (especially among the youngest segments of gypsy society), the gradual acknowledgement of the work ethic, and the need to accept regular employment, will be essential ingredients in their development and are therefore vital to bettering their standard of living.

Following their own cultural dictates, and avoiding acculturation while promoting socio-cultural exchange, appears to be the answer as it is the gypsies themselves who must decide their destiny. For this they must have at their disposal all of the necessary means that we can provide: knowledge, skills and abilities.

The cultural changes and social arrangements must be desired, accepted and, ultimately, structured by them. Overcoming their idleness must be something they want to do.

Our overall opinion is that the gypsies, once they become aware of their problems and realize that some of their habits and customs determine their own welfare and ability to participate in the surrounding society, generally manifest a desire to adopt and adapt those aspects which they recognize as useful for improving their standard of living. However, they refuse acculturation and will oppose an alien civilization, vehemently defending their traditions and their concept of freedom. Like any other minority group, they fear most the possibility of being swallowed up by a society they reject.

It was never our intention to transform them into Portuguese of the gypsy race, but rather to enable them to retain their gypsy culture while teaching them how to "mix" with Portuguese society. Thus we tried throughout to respect their experience, their traditions and the essential values of their culture, especially their language. We encouraged them to demonstrate gypsy culture, only participating ourselves when asked to do so. We did not view the project as an effort to break down their resistance to change. Rather, we strove to nurture cultural change of the sort that would bring the two cultures closer together, without accentuating the differences between them. We had in mind an integration of the gypsies into the larger society that would come about naturally in the course of the gradual evolution of their culture. However, it was not always possible to organize activities in such a way that this aim would be clear to them.

All change represents a threat to them, causing the members of the community to seek refuge within the group. Here there is no conflict with their own ethos and they have a social shield and effective network that together defend them from external dangers which could threaten their solidarity, traditions and cultural identity.

In such circumstances, change is slow and marked by frequent retreats and advances. While on the one hand they may be encouraged and feel the desire for change, on the other they are held back by the force of a culture which demands that they resist change and retreat into their traditional universe.

Therefore in their conservative instincts, the gypsies come up against a conflict: to progress by shedding their "gypsiness" or to eschew progress in order to continue to be gypsies.

It is worth pointing a critical finger here at a certain imbalance noted between the value attributed to culture and the importance attached to integrating the gypsy community. There seemed to be a bit too much insistence on integration, sometimes at the expense of cultural values. Not all programs have succeeded in distancing themselves enough from non-gypsy cultures, thus losing sight of the fundamental principle summed up in the motto: "To progress while remaining a gypsy". When they can get this message across clearly, and when the gypsies can be made to understand it, then the community's fears will disappear and they will accept the proposed changes unconditionally.

This said, there are many signs of change as discussed here: what might be described as hybrid, fluctuating or ambiguous behaviour.

Help must be given to facilitate this process, and we can begin by removing the stigma attached to the gypsy in our collective subconscious, by rehabilitating the gypsies in the eyes of our society, particularly among those groups with which they must interact. We must help them to be understood, or at least better known, to such groups. This help must not be in the charity or social assistance mold, or provided with an air of paternalism. Instead, such help should take the form of projects to promote socio-cultural understanding, with full recognition of their dignity as human beings.

A systematic theoretical-ideological framework for these thoughts might look like this:

- social crisis as (dis)order and challenge, from which emerge signs of gradual change;

- culture as the essential factor of change;

- the principle that it is within man himself that the capital energy for development is to be sought - in his need for subsistence (bettering his standard of living) and his need for expression and participation (improving his quality of life);

- individual values, the sense of difference, personal realization, freedom, creativity, justice and equality that permit alternatives for personal and collective development;

- the right to freedom of action directed toward reforming social practices within the common pattern so as to achieve socio-economic advancement for these people.

As a result of this assessment of the project, its main objectives and guidelines, certain conceptual principles and action strategies were revised:

- Strengthening intercultural relations to facilitate understanding and the overcoming of contradictions, conflicts and the growing disorder inherent in a complex and divergent minority in a society undergoing rapid change;

- Making constructive use of the challenging nature of the gypsies;

- Continuing the project with a view to resolving problems, meeting subsistence needs and improving standard of living;

- Creating conditions for development of abilities (knowledge/awareness, relations/behaviour and organization /change) as the objective and result of the project, so as to minimize the feeling of helplessness noted in the expression of their desires and in the satisfaction of their natural needs;

- Developing, especially in the youngest gypsies, the ability to learn by providing them with the tools needed for self-learning, and encouragement of their growing independence;

- Promoting direct application of the rights of man in relations between the two societies;

- Lessening the weight given to the need for integration and increasing the emphasis on cultural aspects;

- Endorsing regional and local development, and democratizing and decentralizing it as much as possible.

7. **Conclusions**

My work with the literacy program under this project gave me the opportunity to examine and reflect on theory based on practical experience and discussions, teaching me a great deal and enriching my personal and professional experience. Certain aspects of this learning process stand out in particular. New ideas and new convictions were acquired. Work of this sort ought not to be approached with rigidly held belief, preconceived ideas, unalterable opinions, inflexible plans or immutable objectives. The study-action approach is the method best suited to projects of this nature, which deal with a complex community with characteristics so markedly different from our own.

The focus should be on schooling and literacy, placing the highest priority on the children since it is the young that represent

the best means of reaching the parents and the community at large, and that are best placed to influence the future. Literacy programs and the school system are of fundamental importance for the development of the individual, the socio-cultural integration of the community and long-term understanding of the society of which one is part. At the same time, these activities are best able to adapt the individual to the challenges he will face, enabling him to respond to stimuli coming from societies that are themselves undergoing rapid change.

We are witnessing today the slow but sure dilution of the gypsy tradition owing to the pressures to which it is subjected. If relations between the two cultures cannot be changed, the gypsies will surely suffer a form of cultural genocide. Yet despite this, all the gypsies are intimately in touch with their cultural particularity.

Those wishing to approach the gypsies must do so with a certain minimum acknowledgment of that cultural particularity in order to establish through dialogue a dialectical relationship. The gypsy has a different view of the universe from ours; therefore, one must define a strategy that attempts to enhance contacts between the two cultures based on mutual enrichment (as shown in our project). In carrying out social discourse it is essential that information should be conveyed in both directions, as this is an important factor in avoiding undue conflict.

If we fail to remove, or at least ameliorate, our own ethnocentrism, which is just as strong as theirs, if we cannot rid ourselves of racism, rejection of the stranger and our preconceptions about the gypsies, then we will not be able to assist their social integration or help overcome their marginalization, which is encouraged by the strength, force and dynamism of their culture. In view of this attitude on the part of the gypsies, it is legitimate and advisable for us to promote mechanisms of change that meet the needs and expectations of a group which is an integral part of the multicultural mosaic of our country.

We feel that the underlying problems in this process are ethnic and that therefore the development of gypsy communities should be considered from the standpoint of their own culture. This approach might avoid some of the inter-ethnic conflicts and facilitate development of the personality of the individual while respecting his differences.

In the case of minorities, development projects must act as mediators between the different communities and cultures, promoting mutual acceptance and recognition of all peoples.

The encounter between such diverse cultures - the gypsies' and our own - entails a constant process of investigation, and continuous redefinition and rethinking of strategies and methods of intervention. For this reason it is not possible to make long-term predictions or plans. Rather, planning must continue all the while the project is being carried out, with constant reassessment and adjustment throughout.

Finally, we close with a lesson which we learned from the gypsies: a culture is valid only when it can bring together within man the various components of his existence, and when his values and beliefs have a specific and primordial role in it.

Notes

1. As defined in the *Diccionário Enciclopédico Koogan Larousse Selecções*.

2. Some of the data referred to here have been taken from: Olimpo Nunes, *O povo cigano*, Livraria Apostolado da Imprensa, Oporto, 1981.

LITERACY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN A LOWER CLASS NEIGHBOURHOOD

Madalena Dias
Matosinhos, Portugal

The community development program described in this report reveals the strategies of social intervention generated in the course of literacy campaigns and socio-cultural movements. The fundamental principle on which these strategies are based is that of positive social policy supported by educational practices integrated within consciousness-raising models of socio-cultural identity processes.

The conception and execution of socio-educational and cultural programs are viewed not as the task of a particular institution, but rather as a coherent program involving several layers of society - a program, moreover, which calls upon the resources and is the responsibility of the community at large.

Thus, a literacy campaign is understood as a complex social process which acts in support of planned development by halting the spread of illiteracy, one of the social inhibitors preventing full enjoyment of the rights of citizenship.

The action taken, as well as the effects achieved, would not have been possible without the synergy generated through the coordinated, interconnected and converging efforts of many people and agencies which cooperated to create an opening for social solidarity.

1. The Social Context

The program has been underway since October 1988 in an area of housing developments called Biquinha on the outskirts of the city of Matosinhos. Matosinhos is the regional centre for the northern district of Portugal and falls within the metropolitan area of Oporto, which has a total population of 1.2 million.

Beginning in the 1950s the district experienced rapid growth as a result of large-scale migration from inland areas to the Portuguese coast. This created great pressure on the housing market and required the construction of numerous subsidized housing units.

In Portugal, when low per capita income groups have to relocate it generally means moving into one of these subsidized developments, according to such criteria as the type of housing unit, family size and income, but without regard to relations between families, overall neighbourhood composition or community life. The result tends to be social segregation.

Material factors

The Biquinha subdivision is divided into two separate housing developments belonging to different agencies and built at different times: the "old" development constructed in 1973 and the "new" development which went up in 1979. The area also contains a large number of shacks inhabited by ethnic families of gypsy origin, plus a stretch of single-family dwellings whose residents are referred to locally as *Queques Rafeiros*[1].

These developments consist of 3- and 5-storey buildings, the two together containing 544 units (including basement apartments) with close to 2800 inhabitants, plus another 2400 people living in the above-mentioned shacks. Construction of a third housing development is currently nearing completion, with a fourth one scheduled for completion late in 1992. These developments are somewhat smaller, containing 118 and 45 units, respectively. All four developments combined are expected to provide subsidized housing for at total of 3500 people.

The area is deemed one of the most depressed in northern Portugal, with the zone around the "new" development containing the worst slums and socio-economically depressed living conditions in the district.

Most inhabitants are not from the district originally and have come to the development from poorer areas (islands, shanty towns, etc.). Families are often numerous and overcrowding is common. Many are single-parent households.

There is a predominance of young adults with very little schooling[2]; high failure and drop-out rates obtain among those still in school. Low wages, lack of qualifications and general unemployment in the area make finding a job very difficult. The average income level is very low[3] and in some segments of the population less than half of those of working age have jobs, the rest being made up of housewives, the unemployed and young people in

search of their first job. Most of those who have jobs are employed in the construction and metalworking industries (men) or in the textile industry and canning plants (women).

One individual related the following:

> I was sick of being in the second grade and knew I wasn't passing; I sat in the back with the other dunces and had no use at all for books and learning. So I went to look for a job. When I said that I lived in Biquinha, the boss laughed and sent me packing. Eventually I went back to apply again, and this time I lied and said that I lived with my grandmother. A few days later they found out and fired me.

The general underdevelopment in this area includes a great deal of physical degradation of the housing and facilities in the area. Public lighting is inadequate, the area is not properly maintained, buildings show numerous signs of decay, yards are nonexistent, there is garbage everywhere. In short, the picture is bleak indeed and there is plenty of room for change.

Social relationships and values

Daily life among the inhabitants of the developments is characterized by squabbling among neighbours, the coming and going of transients, and virtually no respect for social interrelationships or common civility. Public property in the area serves only as a pretext for discord: the children's playground has been completely destroyed by vandals, entrances to apartment blocks have been defaced and the area contains no collective hygiene facilities. Even children get into fights and often end up in the emergency room of the hospital.

The gypsy residents are an exception in that they do not get involved in fights between neighbours, have close-knit family units and are generally respected by the other inhabitants of the development. So much so that people in the community often employ them to guard their property.

Alcohol abuse, drug addiction and prostitution are rampant among all age groups. The family structure is under enormous pressure with frequent arguments and physical violence by one or more family members against another.

Young women in particular are treated as virtual slaves by their parents. For example, it is common when a child is born in the

development for the oldest daughter of the family to have to quit her job or drop out of school in order to take care of the new arrival. The same thing happens if her mother decides to go to work. Children barely 12 or 14 years of age are sent out to do hard work, and are not even allowed to keep their meagre wages. The exploitation of children in general is widespread and takes many forms, including begging and prostitution.

The spiritual life of the community reflects the general instability among the inhabitants. There are a number of different religions and sects established in the area, and it is their members who give some stability to the development. They are generally the most respected members of the community and the ones with the least divisive family structures.

For some it is religion, and for others it is possessing a VCR and television set that provides social status. Most are very fond of soap operas, action films (especially westerns and war movies) and pornography.

The young people and adults of the community alike are very active in several sports and are said to be especially good in athletics and soccer.

Infrastructure and facilities

The development includes the following infrastructure:

- A primary school with an enrolment of approximately 300 and, since January 1988, a cafeteria at which meals are served for the children;

- A nursery which opened in 1988 and is intended for children three months to three years old (capable of handling about 50% of the day care needs of the community);

- Two local associations, one of which is now inactive. The other is the Biquinha Workers Association (CPTBB) which is mainly involved in carrying out sporting events at the local gym. In December they were put in charge of running this. They also have their own headquarters, which includes some space used as a coffee shop;

- A multipurpose pavilion which can be used for any social, educational or cultural activity. It was opened in December 1989 and is also run by the CPTBB;

- The development has no stores or commercial establishments of any kind.

Finally, the area has a new Council which took office at a time of economic growth and which, in cultivating a progressive social and democratic image, could no longer tolerate the adverse conditions resulting from the area's rapid growth. While responding favourably and attempting to solve the disorganized proliferation of housing, they could not ignore the serious social problems arising within these low-cost housing developments.

2. **The Community Action Project**

Origin of the project

The local community complained with increasing vehemence about living conditions that caused such disruption in their day-to-day relations, pointing out that the new housing system was the cause of so much aggression. They frequently took their ill feelings out on the social institutions of the area, complaining that "You stuck us here and now you just want to forget about us". Because of the difficulty they had integrating in the community, some people kept a hut nearby with a garden, where they could go to spend the day.

The residents of the development besieged various social institutions in an attempt to get help for their situation and improve their future prospects. They were looking for answers to their questions, help with their expenses and low wages, some way out of their many and complex problems.

The teachers at the local primary school warned the local government authorities that children were coming to school hungry, that they frequently fainted in the course of normal school activities and had to be taken to the hospital in Matosinhos suffering from malnutrition. This urgently required a solution and gave rise to an unusual agreement between the Matosinhos Municipal Chamber, the Regional Social Security Centre and the Parish of Aldoar, which

resulted in the opening of a school cafeteria. These children were the victims of a total lack of any kind of basic public health care and had no knowledge of personal hygiene. Many of them suffered from specific learning disabilities as well.

A process was thus begun that had to be self-sustaining from the start because of the lack of response on the one side, and the welfare or functional approach taken to the problems, on the other. The experts involved began to learn from practical experience that this sort of intervention was gaining them little, only making the people even more dependent. The concern was to change the common linear model to a complex dialectic model coordinated through a communications network (Fig. 1) in which all would participate in a process aimed at changing attitudes.

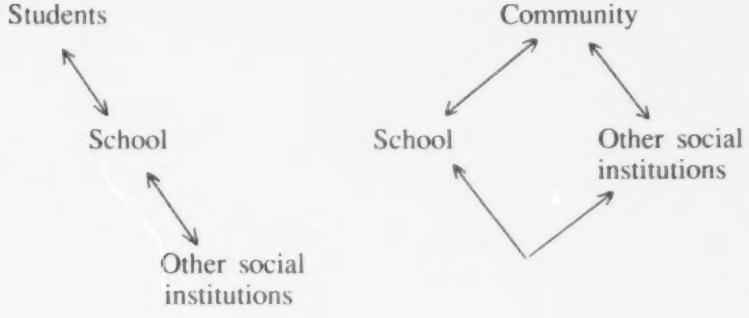

Fig. 1

In March 1988, the Matosinhos Municipal Chamber sponsored a meeting with representatives of the people living in the development and the various institutions that up until then had been acting independently of each other in the community. The idea was to have them join forces in setting up an interdisciplinary team for the purpose of creating conditions that would promote active participation by the community in a process of social rejuvenation. In a meeting that went on for some time, the community, politicians and experts came together and worked out a voluntary declaration of solidarity, under which all agreed to set to work immediately to

form an interactive network to facilitate and ensure cohesiveness of purpose in their endeavours. And so was born the Biquinha Integrated Development Project.

A study was carried out of the population living in the development, and a new meeting was held in May 1988. It was agreed that public opinion should be persuaded to change the general rejection of the community's inhabitants. All of the people seated around the table at the meeting, questioning each other and reflecting on their own attitudes, were in accord concerning the need for opening up and agreeing on the strategies to be followed in the project. From these discussions, two overall objectives were decided:

- To prevent any further deterioration in the standard of living of those living in the development;

- To stimulate/create conditions for participation and organization of the community with due respect for individual and common rights.

The number of institutional cooperants increased and the total number of institutions taking part was about 15, representing areas such as health, social security, government employment and social re-integration services, and education. For those already active in the area it was a matter of reformulating their community action plans; the others faced the challenge of coming up with strategies for intervention in the development. Those of us who work in the Educational Extension Service were in the latter category. Thus we set about creating an operational structure for the project linking the various institutional cooperants in the course of their participation in the lengthy meetings, and setting up a two-fold system of institutional cooperation: in the vertical direction, establishing a chain of command within the institution itself, preparing and mobilizing resources; and in the horizontal direction, promoting the formation of a dynamic, multidisciplinary team, and implementing local strategies. Participation in the project was at all times voluntary.

The overall plans worked out in these long meetings and in the course of normal activities in the area, included the appointment of a group of four - two social service workers (one from the Matosinhos Municipal Chamber and the other from the Regional Social Security Centre) and two teachers (the principal of the primary

school and the head of the Educational Extension Service) - who would act as the executives in charge of implementing an overall strategy for promoting socio-economic and cultural activities in the various groups, within a varied program.

First activities, first results

The end of the school year was almost at hand in June 1988 and the primary school was trying to adjust its teaching program to the current situation. But attempts at holding meetings with parents were getting nowhere so far as the level of participation and the achievement of interdisciplinary goals were concerned. Instead, they served only to articulate discord, with each side complaining about the other.

In attempting to project and disseminate a participatory methodology as our basic approach, we planned an initial joint intervention counting on the catalyzing effect of the local community association movement and the willingness of the school to go beyond the ordinary scope of its educational activities.

The theme chosen for study was garbage disposal within the development, and the children were to produce various types of work. These were then placed on display in the multipurpose room and a discussion was scheduled on this topic one afternoon. This was open to the community, and the council member in charge of the department responsible for garbage collection, plus other officials involved, were invited.

An information network was formed to publicize this event, consisting of the CPTBB and the children attending the school. Men, women and children came that afternoon to experience new ways of approaching their problems.

To animate discussion we produced and mounted a slide presentation entitled "The Garbage". The audiovisual material was intentionally polemic, bringing into question the actions of the municipal government in this area.

The people in attendance reacted in kind, offering examples of similar problems. They began to tell stories of neighbours who "use their bathtub to salt down sardines, so that they always smell like rotten fish", or who "bring their donkeys indoors so that you see them staring out the window". The triumph was one comment, "The problem is they should only put one pig per block, in which case he

will keep clean by example. As it is there are four per block, two of them clean."

They put the blame squarely on the government because of the procedures in its operations for cleaning up the neighbourhood, and the aggressive manner in which it communicated.

Both parties accepted responsibility for the problems and proposed a change in attitude. The government made a commitment to send a work crew to the development to clean it up, and to increase the number of containers available. The people from the development agreed to cooperate in the clean-up campaign and to dispose of their garbage in the areas set aside for this purpose. They spent much time in studying the works produced by their children, as if something new were beginning to happen to them.

This first activity enabled us to observe the power of an intervention of this sort and the reaction of the people to a challenge that touched on a specific problem affecting the neighbourhood they lived in every day. The effect was concrete, immediate, palpable and plain. They were thus able to observe and participate in the clean-up activities, and they could easily understand the relevance and changes that were clearly perceptible.

For us, the next step would be to promote participatory strategies leading to the creation of a project related to educational needs.

The people living in the development began to sense an opening-up to participation. They had many complaints and began to feel that the school was their space, adapting easily to discussing "their" problems - that is to say, the problems of their neighbours.

3. **Literacy and Development**

Our model of integrated development...

Our participation in this development project was attended by a certain expectation, resulting in particular from the fact that we proposed to intervene in the educational sphere with a neighbourhood literacy program to be coordinated with socio-cultural and socio-educational factors. The focus of development would be the community, and the plan was to challenge it gradually to learn how to apply its own management.

In the first stage of setting up the working group with the various institutional cooperants and representatives of the people living in the development, in the extended meetings and within the executive group, we attempted informally to promote the concept of literacy (which for most purposes is simply a matter of teaching basic reading, writing and numeracy) as "cultural dialogue". The educational activity, means and practices were agreed with the inhabitants of the development, assuming an operation aimed at clarification of their manner of living, with social instruction as a common task involving the roles of teacher and learner alike, as equal to equal, creating individual and group instruments of defence for the cognitive and affective rights of each individual.[4]

The intention was to raise the consciousness of the community through action/reflection on the concept. The action would, first of all, have to stimulate social co-responsibility and facilitate the creation of networks for internal (i.e. within the community) and external cooperation in a spirit of solidarity, permitting the community to take advantage of its existing resources and, using these, to respond to the wide range of needs created by the local educational dynamic.

The inhabitants of the community were launched on a process of social intervention which demanded little of them in the way of participation and interaction in the development process, with the result that they had no say in the choice of its long-term goals. It was a matter of providing subsidies so they could pay their debts, of reviewing incomes and of watching their children go hungry.... The effectiveness of these ad hoc remedies belonged to the past, and a new cycle of dependence was setting in.

Their relationships with the outside world did nothing to stimulate development of a conscious sense of controlling their lives. On the contrary, their capacity for personal intervention had stagnated, in part because of their low income level and depressed economic situation.

Now they were beginning to experience new ways of tackling their problems, of undertaking new attempts.

The Educational Extension Service came into this project more as the result of an evaluation of the educational status following the failure of young people and adults to fulfil the compulsory education requirements, than in response to any public demand arising from the consciousness-raising effort or based on complaints about their

inadequate level of schooling. The target groups chosen were young unemployed people with low levels of education, and housewives.

Our project presupposed the capacity for group identification of the need for education. We were constructing an experiment in which the inefficiency of ad hoc literacy programs would stand in sharp contrast to the results obtained in multidisciplinary initiatives pursuing socio-economic and cultural goals.

The social foundations were laid over a long period of time through local development initiatives, with the participation of individuals, groups and organizations belonging to the target segment of the population.

The manner of approaching and promoting adult education was based on opening up and drawing out local sources of knowledge and know-how, and on the role of government agencies and local associations as participants. The main obstacles were the rapid turnover in educators taking part in the project (owing to the lack of full-time professional staff) and the resultant loss of confidence, and a lack of financial resources. Today we have the opportunity to plan and implement operational programs of basic education which combine elements of general and technical-vocational training, with the integrated development of the individual's capacity to change both his social and work environment. The two together constitute an innovation in the use of education in the field of local development.

We were aware that we would be breaking new ground in relying on a strategy of commitment and the possibility for change, in making room for inter-active communication, and in optimizing the resources in each of the subjects as an active protagonist in building his own cultural identity.

Our operational skills, as defined in the theoretical and practical aspects of our frame of reference, would have to be adjusted in the course of the project as circumstances either confirmed or contradicted them.

...and its application

Of the means at our disposal, some were promising while others were problematic:

Training in civics

The government, as the promoter of the project initiated a program of training in civics for residents of the development, so as to open the way for an attack on the housing problem by encouraging the effective participation of those to be the beneficiaries and social agents in the project. This involved obtaining commitments from the other local organizations and institutions, and providing funding and incentives that would mobilize other sources of financing.

The multidisciplinary team

The executive group, whose formation is referred to above, was able to obtain assistance from various sectors, instilling in them a spirit of educational cooperation in a training development program as part of a series of community work operations.

We met every week with the CPTBB at their headquarters where we drew up plans, scheduled and evaluated the progress of events, struggled with the difficulties, optimized the accomplishments and considered the available alternatives. All of these questions and others which arose during day-to-day activities were taken up and dealt with more specifically and in technical detail at yet another weekly meeting, with the Municipal Chamber. At these encounters we tried to balance and perceive the social consequences of the problems identified, with a view to lessening their impact. Officials from the various other social organizations were also invited to these meetings, whenever the activities required their help. Often, where it was deemed more effective, we would pay a visit to these other institutions instead.

Physical site

We had decided that the project would take place within the development, in the broad sense, but there still remained the choice of a specific site to house the educational activities. The alternatives were few and far between. The CPTBB headquarters were too cramped, consisting of an area of only about six square metres with virtually no equipment, and they were not necessarily available on a regular basis anyway. The only other location was the primary school. In one way this would be a good location, in that our preliminary study of dropout and failure rates pointed to a need for early-age literacy training as one of the problems to focus on. On the other hand, the very institution we were considering had been

responsible for the marginalization of these children in the first place. Their own experiences had imprinted in their minds an indelible negative impression that could be a major obstacle from the outset. However, it also represented an educational structure waiting to be conquered, and it was the duty of the project to find the key that would open it up to these children.

Planning of activities

In October 1988 we had reached the planning stage for our project. Until then our contacts with the development had been sporadic. We had established a good relationship and common purpose with the CPTBB, and had participated (albeit virtually anonymously) in a first joint effort at breathing life into the community. Our path was laid out in the aftermath of that first effort and we had the feeling that an important first step had been taken. But where the project would lead us was not known. The only certainty was our faith in the effectiveness of community effort as educationally empowering.

The first task that we set ourselves was to consider the stages required for a development that would have as its goal the formation of a community group for educational purposes. We pondered our roles as teachers and the general objectives that the project should have in order to ensure a multidisciplinary approach. Reflecting on our direct experience, we came up with the following:

- An initial stage devoted to motivation, primarily through regular and systematic contacts in the housing development;

- An intermediate stage of involvement in group identification of needs and problems;

- The development of independence through the formation of groups of individuals who were simultaneously members of the target population and agents for promoting the initiatives.

These stages of the project were to be carried out in what we referred to as the pre-literacy period since it is during this time that a target group for the literacy course is identified.

The projection of a varied agenda for the project called for action to be undertaken on three levels at once:

- An educational component, the aim of which was to promote the development of intellectual skills and basic relationships;

- A socio-educational component, the goal of which was the integration of the individual in the world of employment;

- A socio-cultural component, which could cover, bring together and promote the first two components, coordinating them within the local cultural and behaviourial patterns so as to encourage participation in and effective management of, social regeneration.

4. **Plurality of Approach**

The overall development of the literacy program is analyzed within the context of the movements that gave rise to the pre-literacy phase and those which, during the program, also produced a post-literacy phase. The path chosen for the first phase of the project was later adjusted according to new developments in the target population. The activities, as well as the subjects themselves, arranged for the pre- and post-literacy phases, undergo a continuous interaction to which I will return shortly. But the activities can also elicit different reactions in the subjects, which may result in their educational advance. This exists at an overall level, where strategies, execution and results make up an ongoing exercise.

Pre-literacy phase

The community, source of powerful resources buried in its complexity, is the premiss that underlies the entire course of action. Thus, the life of the community has an endless capacity to act upon and mobilize itself in stimulating individual and collective consciousness-raising, and these help the creation and spread of a network of communications which can change living conditions. Therefore, it seems appropriate to us that community projects such as this should rely on the local authorities as cooperants/promoters within a multidisciplinary approach.

As part of the social approach, I began making informal visits to the development, together with a social service worker from the Matosinhos Municipal Chamber who had regular contact through

home visits with families living there. Most of these visits had to do with overdue rent payments, requests for a reduction in rent or other matters that threatened the residents. On arrival we were generally met by the mother of the family (who was usually a housewife). Sometimes there were men present who were on sick leave.[5] After introducing me as a "teacher of adults" (adults are essentially anyone over 14 years old), the worker would proceed with the purpose of the visit. Meanwhile I would take advantage of the opportunity to open a conversation (which was challenging because of the problems of communication) and we would almost always end up discussing the education of their children.

We noted frequently that the school situation in the family tended to be regressive in the sense of the children having a lower level of education than their parents. They were not indifferent to this fact, insisting that "They're not cut out for studying and never took to it. They went to school until they were 12 or 13, and then began to play hooky. After that they went to work as a bricklayer or in the canning factory. They don't have work papers so they earn very little, but enough to eat. They do whatever is available because they don't know a trade and didn't even finish fourth grade..."

In the course of these conversations, as we discussed their everyday happenings, little by little we would try to challenge them to change the situation they were relating, explaining that all that was needed was the desire to do so. Thus we planted a concern, leaving open the possibility of talking about this further if they wanted to come and visit us at the CPTBB headquarters where we kept regular hours. Many of them went there in any case in the evening to have coffee, use the telephone, watch TV and chat. There were always a few members at the Centre in any case, so we had daily opportunities to exchange ideas concerning the neighbourhood and their way of life.

Family experiences were here repeated as collective problems, and some related to associated activity. Here were the children playing in the middle of the street and in the entrances of the apartment blocks causing damage, which in turn led to conflicts between the mothers. And meanwhile the local gym was kept locked up so that it would not be vandalized.

The challenge of changing this, of opening up new possibilities, spurred this process and raised the need for creating new impulses. It was the joint search for innovative programs for young people that

generated action, and resulted in the creation of three projects co-financed by the Youth Institute. The young people who took part as both animators and participants experienced new forms of organization.

The movement was underway and the people came increasingly to participate in the construction of a matrix of educational interest/needs. We began to sense a certain headway in our effort to relate when the guard of the local gym, a member of the CPTBB and former resident whom we had assiduously cultivated and who usually accompanied us round the development, brought us a list of thirty names and signatures of people living there who would attend a literacy course, or wanted to learn to sew or knit, or to study electricity. We attempted better to understand this movement which had developed slowly over a long period and had now come to fruition, beginning to work with the group in a process conducive to better relationships.

Simultaneously, action was being planned with the association: the setting of specific objectives, the calculation of financial costs and the recruitment of teachers (wherever possible from among the residents of the community themselves). The space limitation was carefully studied and we all came to the conclusion that the primary school was the only possible site. Although the school was immediately made available for the literacy course, a number of bureaucratic obstacles had to be overcome to obtain permission to hold the socio-educational programs (sewing, knitting, electrics) there.

By the end of November 1988 we had four target groups ready to try new experiences: one association to promote new forms of sport, to come together outside the development and to participate in sports/cultural projects and associated initiatives. This group exceeded our expectations with regard to its level of participation and organization.

At the outset it was thought that housewives were underrepresented among the groups, which were predominantly young people. We could not ignore their importance as a key group in the families of the community, especially in the case of those who were able and mature. The following development of the action should inspire new indicators of participation.

The literacy program

Education is a double emancipation of the target group and the community: it integrates the agents (representatives of the community and institutional cooperants) and creates models for participation by the population. The programming of the different activities is participatory, leading to progressive achievement of the objectives. As an activity it is dynamic, catalyzing, flexible, and generates new learning opportunities. It unfolds on the cognitive, emotive and relational planes, promoting self-esteem, stimulating and fostering the acquisition of social skills, empowering and freeing individual capabilities within a context of social intervention, unleashing collective solidarity.

The activities carried out within the CPTBB headquarters were beginning to be overshadowed by the regular meetings of the literacy course in the school, a location to which little by little the community was beginning to gravitate. Some 40 people were attending the literacy course, with 26 in the knitting group, 20 in dressmaking and 37 in electricity. This resulted in overlapping of the groups which made for better inter-relating.

The relationship of belonging to groups thus alternated between the literacy course and the vocational programs, with most opting for training in areas with which they were most familiar. Their reasons for attending were varied. For some it was the possibility of obtaining a Level One Certificate and pre-vocational training linked to their employment needs. For others it was simply the need for social interaction - the chance to experiment with new forms of relating. The activities were carried out in a common area (what we refer to as complementary training) alternating with components that had the following characteristics:

- The reading, writing and numeracy components - contents conceived as an exercise in critical comprehension - reinforce and stimulate the different areas, functioning as "stimulus for" and "consolidation of", in a relationship of dependence, according to the objectives for which they are intended.

- The link between knowing as intellectual knowledge and "know-how" (the publicity poster for the soccer match, the skirt pro-

duced in sewing class...), projected a new idea of knowing oneself.

What we called complementary training was a time to practise free activities and creativity based on current events and association activities. It was based on the co-planning of peripheral aspects only, and according to the dictates of the particular project could involve other local participants, both individuals and institutions. First came the preparations for the Christmas party with the association, leading to the formation of a choral group. Later there were sports events which gave rise to a debate on the nutritional needs of the athlete. And in March 1989 we held the first exhibition of works produced in the courses, together with the showing of animated movies.

The main promoters were the participants from the literacy course, who took charge of coordinating most of the operations. The populace rallied together in massive numbers. They came to the school, observed what was going on, and then turned a critical eye on their surroundings. The next step was the production of a newspaper, which carried information into homes in a effort to spur greater participation in local initiatives.

This dynamism, which had been picked up by a considerable number of people and which now led to even more of them joining the movement, was also the product of the work of the multidisciplinary team. It soon spread to other sectors of the project, giving birth to the idea of holding a month (June 1988) of cultural activities culminating in what became known as EXPOVIDA I, involving the entire community. The theme of the event was "A Clean Neighbourhood", motivated by the beginnings of the effort to restore the apartment complex. There was a competition for the best block, a parade of decorated floats through the neighbourhood to the accompaniment of music, the exhibition itself, a theatre production in the school, sports events, and a folklore and music festival in the gym which was packed with people. All in all, EXPOVIDA I breathed new life into the community.

"These are good times to last a lifetime. We did things we'd never dreamed of. We've been to events in Lisbon and, honestly, this was like the things you see on TV. It was a full day. It gave a whole new life to the neighbourhood. The association is doing more for us all the time - at the gym and in the school, they're always ready to work. A little while ago we had a great festival

with all the schools: the kindergarten, children and adults - suddenly everyone in the neighbourhood is involved in the school." These comments are from a poster signed Sandra.

Socio-cultural movements of this sort, carried out at local level, enrich and consolidate internal and external communication, and promote and stimulate effective delivery of "education". On the one hand, the current participants were indicating a desire to continue during the summer, carrying out vocational programs with the support of the FSE and using general training components in health, industrial safety, social integration and entry to the job market. And at the same time, new groups were being organized and beginning to negotiate their needs.

The lack of social equipment led to the aim of building a multi-purpose pavilion as a cultural centre open to the community and as a support for the development of social skills.

Only by flexible planning, taking due account of the need for raising both human and financial resources adequate to the needs, were we able to respond favourably to the initiatives emerging from the educational context.

Post-literacy period

The educational community was in rapid evolution regarding its organization and active participation in the pursuit of the objectives. It had assimilated, and was now inspiring others to adopt a new active, progressive yet thoughtful model of day-to-day living in which each individual and the group as a whole were finding new ways to promote and realize aspirations. The literacy program will have to be continued, for only in this way can opportunities for real change be made available. The impact of the development inspires the participation of a committed community.

A new set of negotiations followed, balancing the life experiences and adjusting the strategies to newly emerging groups:

- The literacy program was expanded to continue to the Level Two primary school program to complete the compulsory education of those born after 1967. The Level One program had 42 students, the majority being women and young people of gypsy origin, divided into two groups based on different levels of knowledge. Level Two with 60 enrolments was split into three groups.

- The socio-educational courses organized in vocational fields were offered on an alternating basis (sewing, knitting and electricity/metal working) for different age groups. A total of 90 inhabitants of the development signed up and were divided into three groups with some overlapping. For the first time this group included ten housewives.

- The vocational training program coordinated production of local programs, and counseled those requiring access to more advanced training and seeking qualification for employment.

- The complementary training program chose to promote health education in coordination with the local health centre.

- The socio-cultural promotions program based on participation between institutional cooperants and local agents (i.e. people living in the development) generated a training and information network and worked to create multipurpose cultural and support centres for developing social skills.

The overall plan for developing the teaching methods in the literacy program has been brought together here, and has expanded steadily in a constant search for new resources, and reference materials that will bridge the gap between socio-educational and cultural development.

5. **Individual Experiences**

The following descriptions of day-to-day interactions and exchange of experiences between teachers and learners are given to show that the purposes of literacy training have been fulfilled in its role as proponent of the basic education which promotes community forces and adjusts them to the dynamics of regional and local development.

An animator

As a scholarship student, I became a monitor with the Biquinha literacy program in December 1988. My teaching experience until then had been in formal education (distance education), where I was

used to a more or less normal school routine, although in a media environment. I had some involvement in community development work, but only on a sporadic and ad hoc basis. Working with adolescents has always been something I wanted to do and struck me as challenging.

When I began going to the working meetings to set up the group, I was discouraged to see the difficulties of interpersonal relationships and communication. The key words were: facilitate, promote and empower. The contents of the various materials used were based on real participation by the people using materials taken from everyday life, and these were discussed before reading the words and texts. The organized spaces in open areas created an atmosphere of continuous learning and encouraged the development of independence in the participants, which was supported in the research and thinking on the subject.

The participants had the sense of being an active part of the local community force which was cooperating in the various initiatives.

In short, we created a program within which we all could grow, develop and (re)educate ourselves. It became my favourite school.

To enrich my description further I should like to include here the widely divergent experiences of two among many of our participants:

We'll start with Maria and Monteiro, a gypsy couple. Maria began in the literacy course. She was entirely illiterate at the start and frequently attended the class, bringing her husband with her. Monteiro is a fairly well integrated gypsy, dresses differently from his wife and looks like any other European. Initially he had little interest in the class and seemed unmotivated. When he did become enthusiastic, however, he had no trouble doing the suggested assignments. He helped his fellow students and whenever there was a break he would read a newspaper that he brought with him to every class. Maria learned scarcely more than her name and little more when she became pregnant and had to stop coming to class, promising to return after the baby was born. Later she began attending the crafts class, taking it as a point of honour that she would be able to use all the excellent material made there to decorate their house. From the colloquium she attended Maria learned to make use of the health centre. She takes her baby there regularly and is a model mother. Her husband completed Level One and enrolled in Level Two of the literacy program, but dropped out after a month. He joined the local sports team when his talents were

noticed during events held as part of the literacy program. The couple began to see the importance of sharing household duties. They come to see us often and say they aren't going to stop coming for visits. Many of their relatives have also attended the night school program and some are still in the literacy course.

Susana represents the prototype "fishwife". She is known as "smelly" because of her lack of personal hygiene. Her family is among the most squalid of the area and are all referred to as "canoes" because their house is such a pigsty that people say you need a canoe to get through it. Hence the nickname. Her vocabulary was shocking, full of curse words and slang. She went around shouting and swearing at everyone and everything because of her poor family background. Her father is retired and her mother earns a small amount as a domestic during the day. She still has small children who are allowed to roam the streets on their own when she is working. She and her older brother, who was also a student of ours, ran off to Lisbon to escape their unstable home life, returning only when they could not find work. Susana attended the literacy course, although she missed class often, and was progressing at an average rate in reading and writing. She skipped the maths portion altogether. With much prompting and patience she managed to complete Level One. At the same time, she attended the knitting class but showed little interest in it. Eventually she finished one poorly-done item, which was not good enough for the exhibition. She participated from time to time in the debates, meetings and in the parade during the exhibition. She also took one course in decorative art given by the European Social Fund/PRODEP, with barely acceptable marks because of her tendency to disrupt the class with arguments. She attended the Level Two literacy program but did not finish it. She is continuing in this class and has one brother in the Level One class and another in the course on electricity.

Maria da Dores, born to parents who abandoned her, was raised by a woman in the neighbourhood whom she still regards as her mother. Her family are poor and considered social outcasts. She is referred to by the cruel nickname *nhónhó* [contraction and mispronunciation of *senhor*] in reference to her harelip which makes it difficult to speak intellihibly. Mostly she would keep to herself in one corner of the house, lost in her own severely restricted world. The fact that she worked in the canning plant, which left her smelling of fish, meant that her companions mercilessly made fun of

her. She must have been one of the typical cases of malnutrition, as she confessed later after her teacher had gained her confidence, and she felt at ease. She was an increasingly avid student in the Level One program and managed to complete the course although not among the best students. At the same time, she was also taking the knitting course; where she was a very enthusiastic student. Next she took a handicrafts class where she turned out to be the one student with real talent. At this point we were witnessing a real turn-around in both her personality and social skills. Then as she entered adolescence, she underwent a change in which she began to smoke and flirt (in order not to be different from her friends) and drifted away from the school. She attended the first session of the Level Two class and then she disappeared from the neighbourhood, causing great concern among her teachers. Their investigation revealed that she was staying home, and that she was in such need that she often had nothing to eat. She had begun working as a domestic but earned scarcely enough to survive. She tried to start classes again, but since they were at night and she could not afford even the transport costs, she had to drop out again, promising that she would get organized and begin again the following year. She told her friends that she misses school, and she sent two sisters and one brother to take courses.

People in the community

My name is Albina Rosa and I am the only married student in the literacy course. I'm 25 years old and have a beautiful 4-year old daughter who is in the nursery school in Matosinhos. Before, she was in the nursery here, but at the age of three she had to change. I have to take her and pick her up every day. We live in an apartment block in Biquinha, off the ring road. I used to live in a hut, but I went to take care of my godfather, who has since died, and now we live in his house. I like the house and the area where we live, as we have all the conveniences that were lacking before. I took the gardening class at the CPTBB centre and am now the official gardener for the neighbourhood. I like my job. I am very fond of plants and like to see them well cared for and used to beautify the landscape and the interior of houses. They are good for the environment and for people. I'm going to set up a gardening class for others in the neighbourhood. We'll see what happens. To

do this I am taking Level One of the literacy course. I'm trying hard not to miss any classes because I know they are doing me a lot of good. I'm learning many things that I didn't know, and if possible I plan to take Level Two, as well. My husband was also in the literacy course for two years, but because of his work schedule he was not able to meet the objectives set at the beginning of the course. The same thing happened last year when he started going to classes with me, and then had to stop. Studying is good for you. You feel that you are growing up like a child. Anyone who has the opportunity to study should not waste it.

My name is Jose Maria. I am the oldest student. I am 32 years old, have five children and I love my family very much. I live in an apartment in Biquinha near the gym and CPTBB centre. It was a great joy to obtain this house with a bathroom, three bedrooms and a kitchen. My wife and children and I do everything to clean the house. Our life is hard because we have to go from place to place to sell our wares. We get up at 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning and my wife and I go to work to earn a living. We work hard, but it is worth it since we live without difficulty. Many in the neighbourhood live poorly because they don't want to work. I go to the literacy centre, and since my house is near the school, I go there every day, but only for a quick bite. What I really want is to finish the literacy course and learn something. I tried going to a course in Matosinhos, but since it was so far away, I quit. Here in Biquinha I have been studying for three years, and this year I learned to read and write. I have a son named Mario who goes to school during the day, and I am very happy to be able to help him when necessary. The oldest ones did not go to school, so when they reach the right age they will go to adult classes. My friends want to obtain the certificate so they can get a driver's licence. I have mine and I drive a big car. Since I work hard, at night I like to go to the centre and play cards with my friends and neighbours. I like living in Biquinha. We are all happy to see that our neighbourhood is the envy of the others around us. It is up to us to make sure that everything is made even better. Before, the centre was only for sports. Now it does many other things and cooperates with the night school for many new programs. School is very important for adults, too.

My name is André Monteiro and I am 19 years old and married. I was born and live in a hut in Matosinhos. Although it is small, the hut is always neat and tidy, and is better than some of the houses in Biquinha. We have a TV set, a VCR and other appliances. I would not like to have to live in that neighbourhood because of all the people and traffic. I like the place where we are and I would be very sorry if we had to move. I found out from my gypsy cousin, who is a school guard, that in Biquinha they have school during the day and at night too. I started coming here and am happy with the school. Every day there is something new to do. My cousin Felizardo is the best student because he has never missed a class. Sometimes we don't even have time to have a bath. We have to go directly from work (we work loading and unloading cars and trucks for the TIR) to school, so that we can be here when the classes start. When we get hungry, we have to go and find something to eat. In the night school (literacy course) we keep a journal in which we write short texts and sign our names. We take photographs and learn to read the signs, then we make posters of them and about things in our lives. With Mario we make wicker baskets that we can sell during the festival. But we do this for pleasure really as we don't make much money. When I want to, I go to the electricity class. So far I've learned how to make connections and use the tools. Back home then, we can connect up with the lines on the street, so we have lights. I buy the paper to read in the café now. I can only read some of the words, and others I learn at school. I want to see if this year I can complete the course and then buy a car so I can sell things at the fairs. That way I can make more money. On my job I can only make three thousand escudos in a day, and sometimes I go for two or three days without making anything. And the family has to eat every day. When I can go and sell things at the fairs, my wife will come and learn to read.

A resident and the Director of CPTBB

I am Manuel da Cruz Dias, married with eight children and 45 years old. I was born in Esmoriz and have lived in Biquinha for 11 years. In the beginning it was hard to adapt, as I had never lived in a neighbourhood like this. In time I got used to it and made new friends. Now my whole life is wrapped up in Biquinha. The only entertainment here then was the CPTBB.

I am one of 11 directors of the centre. We meet once a week, at night, with the social worker of the Municipal Chamber and the adult school teacher, to deal with matters concerning the neighbourhood project. Sometimes other people connected with the project come to the meetings as well. Last week we had a French journalist as a visitor. Our names appeared in a French newspaper, which told about the work we are doing, and that everything we do is for charity. Our gym organizes soccer tournaments; dances for children, young people and seniors; other sports events like handball and American football. Fishing, table tennis and track and field are our latest activities. All these programs are led by our own young people in their free time, as part of the program of the Youth Institute. We also organize visits to important places like Inatel and the Antas. Along with the teachers and monitors, we organize all of the activities of the Adult School. We have a joint budget and it requires a lot of work. The association support project pays a young man from March to December, and he does many tasks for us.

Now our Centre has more than just sports. We have a big Christmas party and celebrate the anniversary of the Centre's founding. We sponsor floats and parades for Carnival, and we have held events for World Youth Day, EXPOVIDA and St. John's Day. All of this is done by our own young people and in the night school and nursery. Now visitors are coming from all over to see us.

At one point I had an operation on my back and was off work. The president of the Centre asked me to go and help the teachers and students with their courses every night from 6:30 to 11:00 o'clock. I began doing this on January 3, 1990. There were a lot of students and it was no easy task controlling young people and adults, 14 to 40 years old. This was serious and responsible work. With a lot of tolerance, the young ones got used to the discipline and got down to the work of education. Despite what you might think, with one thing and another I managed to pull it off without a hitch.

This year has been much easier because they are already used to the rules. We all live in the same neighbourhood, so it is well that I get along with the students, teachers and monitors, and have developed friendships with all of them. What we are doing here is important and responsible work, and we have to respect each other. Some of the teachers have moved away, but we still remain friends. We are almost at the end of the school year and I can hardly wait

for next September, so I can continue with this task that gives me so much pleasure.

A young teacher/animator in the literacy program

These past three years are worth ten to me. At the end of 1988, several initiatives were started in Biquinha, among which the most important were the literacy program and the socio-educational classes. The objectives were simple, but we never anticipated the results achieved in just three short years. The first problem at the start was to find out whether the people would back such a large project. Very quickly the problem became one of whether we could keep up with the enthusiasm of the people involved!

I was one of the first to take the literacy courses and the class on electricity. Since I didn't know much about them, I didn't hesitate to join up. I knew it would be to my advantage, at least for the comradeship of my fellow students and the monitors. The same thing happened with my mother and two sisters who also joined the course, so we set out with trepidation but also with a great deal of hope.

We began to succeed from the first year, and the proof of this is that we never dropped out. We went to all the classes and had great plans. Our greatest moment was EXPOVIDA I, at which we were able to display the many works produced by everyone in the program. We all had a wonderful time and were very enthusiastic throughout this period. It ended with an enormous festival and dance that everyone attended in the gym building. And since then we have had EXPOVIDA II and III, each one better than the last. It was a fantastic event and I am very proud to have been a part of it.

But in the end, what did this course mean to us, what was its value and importance? Well, it gave us a start and showed us the way to socio-cultural development, and even to finding a job in a community with many problems, and which had never before been able to develop - my community. Many of my friends now have jobs or are self-employed as electricians, mechanics or seamstresses. Others who did not know how to read and could not even write their own names now know how to do these things and are aware of what is going on around them. All of this has been a great success. My mother, who is 47 years old, went out and got a job, and so did my sister. The old saying that "one success leads to

another" is still true. This was the case with me too. After these projects, other successes followed and now in my free time I work as an animator. I try to help all of the children in Biquinha, so that they will do something - anything at all -with their free time instead of just wandering around aimlessly.

I am still studying at night. Among the good things we have learned is how to relate to other persons and things. I have taken a course as a computer operator and now Zé Silva of the CPTBB and I are trying to get other young people to learn computers too. I hope everything keeps going like this since we have many wonderful plans and are always opening up new paths.

A monitor in the sewing class

My name is Laura and I have lived in Biquinha for 18 years - in the old development, as we call it. I am married with two children and work as a seamstress. I live with my parents and brother in a house with only two rooms. Three years ago we began to change our way of living and thinking about our problems.

Everything started at the Centre, with the adult education teacher and the social worker from the Municipal Chamber. They were very enthusiastic, and soon had many young people involved in the project. They asked me if I could be a monitor for a class on sewing, and although the idea had never occurred to me before I was very excited about it. First I went to the literacy course that they started to give when the school stayed open at night. The neighbourhood started to come alive and to act differently as people began to understand that here was a way to change their lives and solve their problems. Things changed very quickly once the residents of the development began get moving. These courses were a lifesaver for many and got the neighbourhood going as never before. Something was going on at the gym and in the multipurpose pavilion almost every night, and people began to get interested in finding out what was happening there. Soon they were taking part in activities such as colloquiums, reading classes and movies.

The first class in dressmaking started in January 1989. Now this is the third year that I have been working with one group of young people and another of housewives. The interests of these two groups are different, as well as the types of things they do. Often we work together with the students in the literacy class. Now many of our

younger students have gotten jobs in the textile industry. Some have even gone on to a more advanced course, and still others have switched from the canning industry - which they hate - and have now taken up sewing. It often happens that someone in this class feels the need to attend the literacy class more often and work on getting certificates. When they finish this class, almost all of them are able to make up clothes and other useful items for the home, which they see in the fashion magazines. This makes them feel more attractive and saves them a lot of money.

Right now we are looking at some of the problems that will come up during construction of the new blocks. We are going to have a new Centre, offices to work in, a bakery, a small market, a hairdresser's shop and space for children's leisure activities. But our biggest problem has to do with housing. Many apartments have only two rooms and up to 21 people. Every week we discus these problems and we think that a few people are going to be able to solve their housing difficulties. It's a shame that not everyone can do so.

We have much more respect for ourselves now that we are working hard and dedicated to making Biquinha a better place to live.

6. **The Results and the Problems**

Changes

The success of the community project team has been directly proportional to its ability to develop dynamic action stimulating the people - the social agents - to participate in research aimed at education, increasing their motivation, and putting them in touch with their problems. The relationship established is a complex one, in which everything was taken into account from speech to posture. The educational strategy and the underlying methods were based on diverse and on-going actions in the context of continuing education, which has been planned and is being participated in by all members of the community. The emphasis is on the efficiency and effectiveness of the local community association movement in mounting intervention in literacy, socio-cultural animation and socio-educational

courses, through which the challenges were slowly but surely organized into structured and formalized plans.

Literacy training assumed a central role in the local structures. It has come to be understood not as a goal or aim of the educational system divorced from real life, but rather as an active principle from which emanates a series of interconnected activities. These generate cohesion, identification, values, in which each individual finds his place and carries out his role within the community. The people are beginning to understand the movement that is providing the dynamism for changing present conditions and thus building their future. The numbers joining have exceeded the expectations of the organizers. It has now become clear that the movement is unstoppable, as more and more programs are being requested and other ways of organizing the project are taking shape. It is beginning to form a model of participation. Young people and adult participants in the literacy courses are finding their place within the local structures. They are becoming the engineers of their own transformation and animators par excellence. In short, they are adopting a new way of life.

Physically, the neighbourhood is changing as most of the houses are being renovated. Exterior areas are being cleaned up and gardens are springing up. At the local gym, in the pavilion and the school, all over the neighbourhood sports and socio-cultural events are being organized on a regular basis and with everyone involved in the process. These strengthen and raise the awareness of the value of cultural identity. Day-to-day life is more thoughtful. It has been reformulated and recreated, with a pool of ideas produced by the life experiences of each and every one of the inhabitants.

The Biquinha development project is continuing and has just been nominated for inclusion in a national program that would provide funding to ensure its consolidation until 31 December 1995. A low-cost housing development which, until recently, was considered one of the worst slums in the district is now being improved at several different levels; it is promoting exchanges of experience and well on its way to becoming a "model" of development.

Obstacles

The main obstacles were not knowing the difficulties and having insufficient faith in the research approach that was guiding us as

participants in a project of integrated development. The project was intended to substantiate the way of life in the community, and designed to take advantage of the rights and resources of the target groups themselves. The inter-active strategy between educational, socio-cultural and economic aspects was based in essence on a relationship of dialectic communication among the protagonists, and between these, the obstacles encountered and the resources. The problem of these relationships entails conceptual, operational and ultimate values, which are the forces producing real changes in living conditions.

In the initial stages of the community project, our status was that of relative outsiders. But in dealing with the other institutions involved, this enabled us at times to defuse the antagonisms that sometimes arose when, in the course of developing cooperation, certain bureaucratic and traditional rigidities were encountered among these institutions.

Only by strict adherence to the principle of building cohesion into the way of life of the community were we able to persevere and produce results conducive to an attitude of institutional openness. This was especially true regarding the use of spaces not permitting a "neutrality" (such as the primary school). This resulted in a constant challenge, which at times assumed the most inelegant forms of aggression. It also revealed another side of the school system.

Those who joined our activities were strongly influenced by outside factors (seasonal employment, weather conditions, etc.), which are indicative of their weak relationship to the outside world. The undertaking of issues related to basic necessities of life (food, housing, etc.), and directly entailing the carrying out of day-to-day educational activities, were those that required the greatest delicacy of treatment.

At the same time, the publicizing of the work done by some institutions on an ad hoc basis in organs of communication, using aggressive forms of communication (e.g. "Parish of Aldoar halts hunger in Biquinha"), at times provoked the inhabitants of the development, and caused subsequent periods to be marked by backsliding and behaviourial problems.

The conflicts were overcome through the consistent encouragement of new collective and individual attitudes.

7. Conclusion

Growth and development are complementary key-concepts relative to social well-being, the market for which - when analyzed from the standpoint of the local community - is based on the law of supply and demand in the socio-cultural and economic forces. Many and varied are the internal and external factors which cause ruptures in social systems and face the people with serious problems related to their way of life.

The regional and national structures call for developments to promote social processes which are participatory and capable of removing the obstacles to overall development of the populace.

The Biquinha integrated community development project is the result of an open policy of empowering people on the basis of internally produced social realities. As such, it promotes the optimization of human resources and the participation and creativity of the social agents, who gradually acquire greater capacity to intervene in their own affairs and control their own actions.

Literacy and basic education are at the top of the agenda for adult education where the latter is to be used as a method of improving the socio-economic position of disadvantaged groups.

It is not enough to patch up the school systems, or to beef them up with extracurricular programs. It is necessary to transform them in conjunction with social practices and strategies. The matrix of educational practices that make up a post-literacy frame of reference are not simply another level in the educational system. Rather, they represent a feedback mechanism and a means of promoting follow-up action. Such activities cannot be dissociated from the political scene in which they operate as the real determinants of participatory democracy. Progress and the distribution of knowledge are dependent upon the structure and division of power, both inside and outside the school.

The initiation of a strategy for change demands reference to social levels and practices which are being adjusted to locally emerging initiatives. This is a slow, informal process whose conceptualization and subsequent implementation affect the motivation of the agents involved, their capacity for active participation, and their commitment to the search for innovative solutions.

When conditions favour the exercise of the right to education and training, and the true meaning and usefulness of learning are made clear, the people are very receptive to them.

Notes

1. *Queques* (cakes) is the slang term for the inhabitants of upper class neighbourhoods; *rafeiros* (sheepdogs) adds a further pejorative note.

2. In 1988 only 12 of the area's inhabitants had completed the compulsory six years of elementary school.

3. Some 65% of families in the area have per-capita earnings between US$ 5,000 and US$ 15,000.

4. Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*

5. The term *baixa* refers to being off work through illness.

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BUILDING A REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP IN THE FIGHT AGAINST ILLITERACY IN BELGIUM

André Chapotte
Françoise David
"Lire et écrire", Namur, Belgium

Our Approach

"1990, International Literacy Year, a Time for Action"

The Province of Namur was the first Belgian province to embrace the UNESCO slogan and join the fight against illiteracy.

In December 1990, 20 of the province's 38 communes, following the lead of the provincial government, adopted the following provincial charter or manifesto.

- *Namur Manifesto for a Literacy Campaign*

  THE AUTHORITIES OF THE COMMUNE OF ....., AWARE OF THE CHALLENGE OF INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR

  HAVE DECIDED, WITHIN THEIR BOUNDARIES, TO

  - conduct a public awareness program,
  - give top priority to organizing joint action by the Commune's Centre public d'aide sociale and representatives of all associations,
  - organize, individually or jointly with authorities in neighbouring communes, courses designed to meet local needs,
  - make available to continuing education movements the infrastructure essential to decentralization, and
  - inform national, community and regional authorities of the need for their permanent support if literacy activities are to be expanded in a consistent fashion.

In today's climate of austerity, which has hit social expenditure particularly hard, one may well ask why and how regional and local authorities and administrations have taken such a definitive stand on support for the continuing education literacy movement.

As the Charter states, participating communes agree, not merely to give symbolic support, but to make concrete contributions (e.g. premises, material support, financial support) toward the common objective, which entails, over the next ten years, *offering any individual the opportunity to take classes close to home or to travel to such classes, free of charge, by public transportation.* It was essential to reach these authorities and make them fully aware of the real implications of illiteracy.

How did this partnership develop? What groups were involved (including those behind the scenes); which associations and movements were fighting illiteracy in the province? And who were the illiterate? How long have they been a subject of interest; what methods have been applied? Finally, how many years of preparation were required to focus scattered efforts on a common objective? Our subject matter here is the process of interaction and local complementarity, and integrated co-operation among social, educational, administrative and political participants.

Geographical Context

Before describing the process used to focus effort on the literacy campaign, a few words on geographical context are appropriate.

The Province of Namur, one of nine Belgian provinces, is a French-speaking area in the south of the country, at the heart of Wallonia. There are three main language groups in Belgium. These are, in decreasing order of size:

- the Dutch-language community, in the north (Flanders) and in Brussels;

- the French-language community, in the south (Wallonia) and in Brussels; and

- the German-language community in the extreme east.

For administrative purposes, each province is a territorial subdivision of Belgium (Fig. 1). It is responsible for managing all matters of provincial interest (e.g. social policy, public health, culture, education, public works, economic development and tourism). It is both subject to the federal government and responsible for the communes it contains.

The Province of Namur is located in central Wallonia, at the intersection of the main Paris-Liège-Cologne and Brussels-Luxembourg-Strasbourg-Basel lines of communication. It has a population of 415,000 and occupies 12 per cent of the country's land area. The population density, 110 inhabitants per km^2, is relatively low compared to the country as a whole (three times greater). It contains 38 communes, the most densely populated being: Namur - largest city in and capital of Wallonia, approximately 100,000 inhabitants; Sambreville - 28,000 inhabitants; Andenne, 21,000 inhabitants.

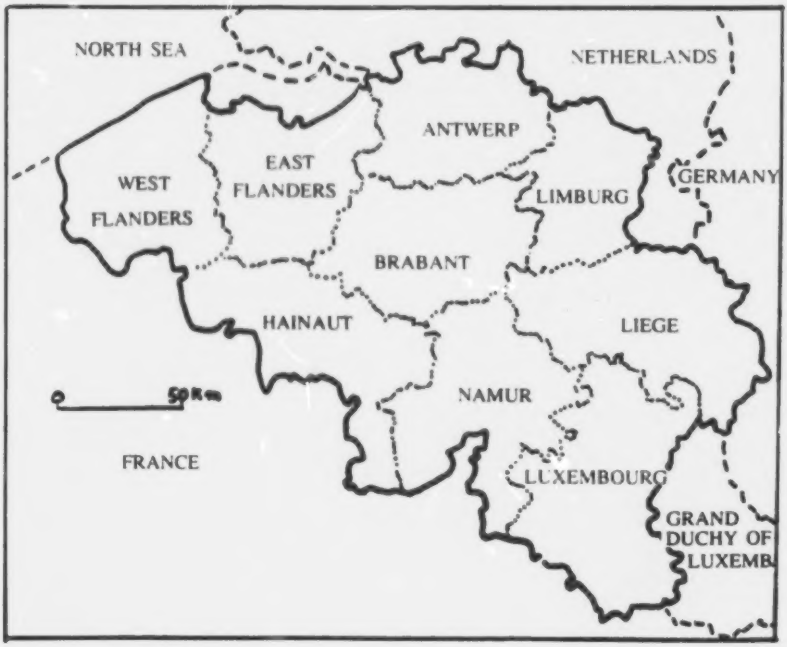

Fig. 1. The 9 Belgian provinces

The three communes are located along the east-west axis of the Sambre and Meuse industrial valley.

Most of the province's other communes have relatively low population figures, an indication of their rural nature: 13 communes have population figures between 5,000 and 10,000; 13 communes have fewer than 5,000 inhabitants (Table 1).

	BELGIUM	
3 COMMUNITIES	9 PROVINCES	3 REGIONS
- FRENCH		- WALLONIA
- DUTCH		- FLANDERS
- GERMAN		- BRUSSELS
	589 COMMUNES	
	± 9,800,000 INHABITANTS	
	6,000,000 ELIGIBLE VOTERS	

Table 1: Relative situation of provinces and communes within the administrative structure of Belgium

Both economically and demographically, the Province of Namur has a bipolar structure. On the one hand, it contains the east-west industrial and services industry axis along the Sambre and Meuse valley; and also the industrial zones along the provincial autoroute and round the province's largest city, Namur, all high density areas. On the other hand, the countryside to the north and south of this axis is dotted with a few pockets of service industry and new industrial centres; in these areas, population density is much lower (Fig 2).

The Sambre and Meuse valley has a long tradition of industry and a high density of working population. Its former prosperity was based on chemical works, glassworks, quarries and coal mines. Through the 1960s and 1970s, the coal mines shut down one after the other, producing high unemployment among the population. This

included a large number of Italian, Greek, Turkish and Moroccan immigrants who had come to replace Belgians turning their backs on such dangerous and unhealthy work.

The unemployment picture was made even worse by the recession and the subsequent restructuring and consolidation of other traditional enterprises. The number of unemployed workers became too large to be absorbed by the demand for labour in the new automated firms in the industrial estates and the growing service industry centres around Namur. Job distribution by economic sector in the Province of Namur by the end of the 1980s had become:

5.5% Primary sector (agriculture, mining)
32.9% Secondary sector
61.6% Tertiary sector

The rural areas extending north and south from the east-west axis are largely populated by workers in tertiary (i.e. service) industries who have jobs in Namur, Brussels and smaller towns. Although agriculture dominates the landscape in these areas, only 5 per cent of the province's population is currently engaged in agriculture.

However, through family ties, tradition, public opinion and lifestyle, most of the area's population has kept its attachment to rural values. To some extent this mental attitude is widespread in Namur which, although it is the province's largest city is surrounded by countryside.

Illiteracy in the French Community of Belgium

Total illiterates are unable to read, write or recognize letters. This group represents a minority compared with all those who cannot read or write well enough to understand the meaning of what they read or fill out simple forms.

Generally speaking, members of the latter group attended school for a number of years but, for a variety of reasons to be discussed later, gradually forgot or rejected the knowledge acquired. These people are generally known as functional illiterates. In today's urban society, such people, in varying degrees, have difficulty dealing with everyday situations such as reading a bus or train timetable; finding a number in a telephone book; reading directions on a food package;

Fig. 2. The 38 communes in the Province of Namur.

understanding highway signs; reading a highway map or city plan and finding a route; helping a child with homework; reading a contract, an invoice, prescription directions; writing a cheque.

Functional illiteracy is thus generally defined with reference to the demands of a particular society. It is a relative concept based on predefined criteria. Because skills that may appear sufficient in one context are clearly insufficient in another, it is difficult to evaluate the functional illiteracy threshold for any particular population or to assess the extreme variability of statistics emerging from studies, surveys and censuses.

In Belgium the army has produced the only statistics on illiteracy: the partial illiteracy rate among army personnel is estimated at 1.5 per cent. These figures disregard huge segments of the population (e.g. women, the elderly, men exempt from military service, foreigners) and seem disproportionately low compared to quantitative data from neighbouring countries.

The UK reports that 13 per cent of young adults have problems writing and doing simple arithmetic. The data are the result of a 1981 study of a 23-year old population cohort. In France a 1988 survey conducted on behalf of the Groupe permanent de lutte contre l'illettrisme reported that 21.8 per cent of the adult population has difficulty reading and writing. In June 1989 INSEE reported that 9 per cent of adults have serious problems with reading, writing and oral expression.

To arrive at a more accurate estimate of the functional illiteracy rate in Belgium's French-speaking community, the Lire et écrire association, which coordinates the literacy campaign, weighted the army data (tests given to militiamen), Office national de l'emploi data (according to the level of education reached by the unemployed surveyed) and studies done in the various countries of origin of the immigrant communities living in Belgium. The results indicate that between 300,000 and 500,000 adults have a mastery of the written word insufficient to deal with the requirements of everyday life. This represents a bracket of between 7 per cent and 13 per cent of the population, which is consistent with the estimates for neighbouring countries[1].

On a smaller scale, the Province of Namur has approximately 40,000 functional illiterates out of a total population of 415,000. In 1990, 185 individuals took literacy courses. Behind the bare figures there are real people and real stories about the botched lives

of so many of the illiterate. Why are people illiterate? Education has been free and obligatory for nearly a century.

It is helpful to remember that the high rates of illiteracy in Europe were revealed during the recession of the 1970s. When the recession hit, people who, in spite of inadequate reading and writing skills, easily found jobs in times of full employment, were among the first fired; once unemployed, they had most difficulty finding another job.

Not only were far fewer of these people hired, but companies operating according to job supply and demand raised qualification requirements. Employment structures have changed radically in the past 20 years: drastic cutbacks in the service industry sector and state-of-the-art technology developed by industry have led to a massive loss of unskilled jobs.

Nearly 50 per cent of the long-term unemployed (unemployed for at least two years) surveyed by the Service subrégional de l'emploi en Province de Namur do not have an elementary school certificate. These people are automatically excluded from the traditional vocational training channels (social development course - tertiary or secondary program given by l'Office de l'emploi - general high school program) for which the entrance requirements exceed their education level. For many of them, the most extreme cases, literacy training is truly the only training available, prior to a personal development course designed to upgrade basic skills.

Now that we have described the economic context in which the social scourge of illiteracy emerged in our country, we still have to explain the odd paradox that individuals, most of whom attended school for a number of years (more than eight), reach adulthood unable to read. In a country where schooling is obligatory, the handicap of illiteracy is far more serious and a far greater embarrassment than in a society where illiteracy is the norm.

A 1985 survey conducted by Lire et écrire and sponsored by the EEC reveals a large number of illiterates who openly accused the school, its methods and its teachers of being the source of their ignorance of the written word, even of their exclusion.[2]

The drastic cuts in education budgets by governments worried about the public debt have led to overcrowded classes, outdated teaching materials, demotivation of education professionals, pupils and teachers, and an undeniable overall dysfunction of the school in relation to its objective of democratizing education.

The school has not found (or not taken) the means to take into account and promote in the learning process the children's own forms of expression, which differ according to milieu. By imposing a single cultural model in an effort to compensate for the shortcomings of the family, it has had, and continues to have, a colonial attitude which turns many children unconsciously against learning and ultimately creates failures.

As things stand, since the school is unable to compensate effectively for the shortcomings of the family, one consequence (at least in Francophone Belgium) is that the family environment (at least in some families) now makes up for the deficiencies of the school.

This doubles the discrimination against the child whose family background does not match the dominant cultural model. If neither school nor parents compensate for the cumulative deficiencies compared to the other pupils, these children inevitably fall further and further behind, and the gap separating the two groups of children continues to widen.

In Belgium 25 per cent of vocational students (one quarter of secondary school students) leave school with no qualifications whatever, deficient in writing, mathematical and reading skills. Because most of them have no solid mastery of these skills, they swell the ranks of the functionally illiterate.

The chasm separating the cultural model transmitted by the school and the experience of children from the most disadvantaged background reinforces inequality and eventually produces a bitterness and aversion to knowledge in these children, which excludes them from all education channels. The figures relating school failure to socio-cultural milieu speak for themselves (Figs 3, 4).

Exclusion from the education framework, which deprives individuals of the training required to find a job and condemns them to all types of assistance, has an impact on living conditions. Most illiterates, excluded from the labour system, live a precarious existence, on a minimum income provided by social assistance or unemployment benefits. The smallest accident or setback drops them into the severe poverty which, according to a survey conducted by the Centrum voor Sociaal Beleid of the University of Antwerp, is the lot of 7.3 per cent of Belgian households.

Severe poverty, defined as a permanent situation of shortage and privation, goes with inadequate housing and poor health. In

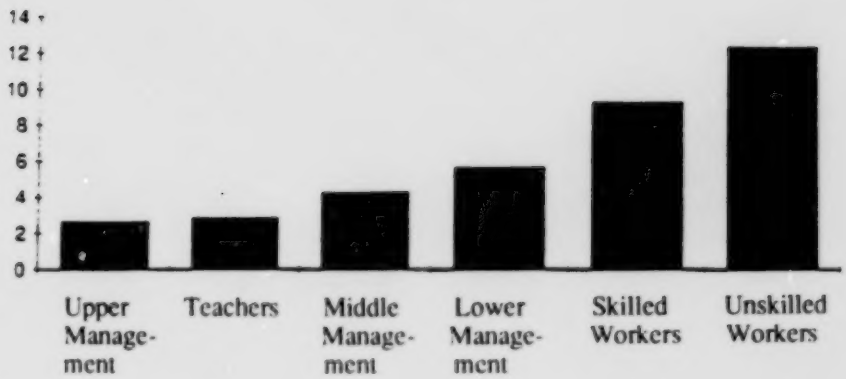

Fig. 4. Percentage of children below standard at end of Grade 6 elementary 1984 (by father's profession)

Source: *Le Ligueur*, 1990 (periodical published by la Ligue des familles de Belgique)

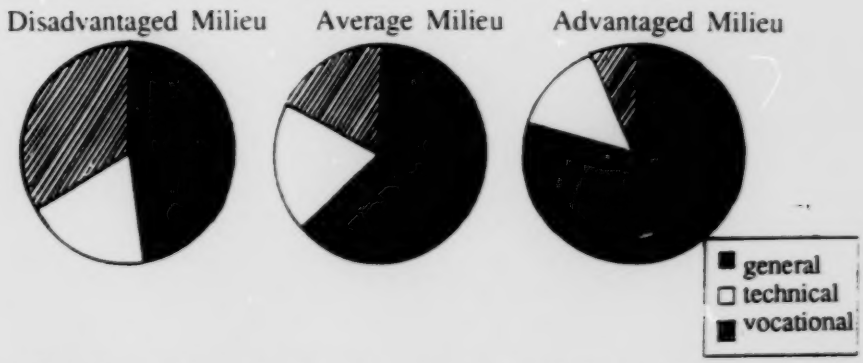

Fig. 5. Type of education program selected based on social hierarchy (1984)

Source: *Le Ligueur*, 1990 (periodical published by la Ligue des familles de Belgique)

Wallonia 107,000 households live in substandard buildings. Conditions in the Province of Namur, where 45 per cent of dwellings are substandard, are among the worst recorded. Rural communes, with a 56 per cent rate of substandard housing, are at the bottom of the scale, as the result of rising rents in Namur, demolition, expropriation and spiralling business and housing real estate prices for commercial and luxury dwellings in the town centre. Some people end up homeless: with no fixed address, they squat in abandoned buildings or sleep at the station.

Considering the appalling living conditions of many illiterates (lack of heating, malnutrition, substandard housing, constant material worries), health is an especially serious problem. The cumulative effect of poor living conditions has a serious impact on overall health. Illness, in addition to producing additional expense for persons already living on the edge, requires them to make sense of insurance forms and medical prescriptions, a considerable task for the illiterate, and one that adds to their feelings of embarrassment and dependency.

Illiteracy and the resulting social exclusion appear as the result of an accumulation of events which feed on one another. A variety of factors (school/unemployment/income/housing) begin the cumulative marginalization process. This is why it is so important, when addressing this group, to coordinate all efforts, especially those of social workers and persons responsible for basic education (teachers, literacy workers).

In the long term, literacy implies fighting for the right to decent housing and providing vocational training for below-average students and, as a corollary, fundamental changes within the school. What is required is joint effort toward social education in the broadest sense, to give the illiterate a real opportunity for education and to reintegrate them into the labour force and society.

Literacy: Institutional Framework within the French Community and in the Province of Namur

Associations and premises for the promotion of literacy have existed in Belgium for twenty years. Until the early 1980s, the goal of these institutions was literacy for foreigners (immigrant workers and their families, political refugees). In 1982, in the recession and

unemployment context described above, two Brussels associations began to examine the problem of illiteracy in the Belgian population. The two groups are ATD (Aide à toute détresse) Quart-Monde and the Collectif d'alphabétisation.

In their wake, in the four corners of the French Community, a number of adult education groups affiliated with the Christian and socialist wings of the labour movement (which provided training to workers, groups with low education levels and school dropouts), began to show an interest in illiteracy and decided to co-operate in setting up a literacy structure. The various groups merged to form regional federations. These include Canal-Emploi in Liège, Défis in Brussels, Radio-Télévision-Animation in Namur and FUNOC (Formation pour l'université ouverte à Charleroi). Together they provided coordination throughout the French Community of Belgium and set up an initial awareness operation focusing on 8 September 1983, International Literacy Day.

This joint operation was given the name of "Lire et écrire". The primary objective of the operation was to enable everyone in the French Community of Belgium who wanted to learn to read and write to do so.[3]

As a result of the initial campaign, literacy groups grew out of the various continuing education movements in association with regional federations, largely in the Sambre et Meuse industrial valley. In the Province of Namur, groups were formed in Namur, Sambreville and Andenne.

The next requirement was literacy worker training. At the outset this was provided by previously existing groups (e.g. Collectif d'alphabétisation de Bruxelles); it was then carried to the regions by literacy workers who, within their own groups, acquired considerable experience in a very short time.

In the Province of Namur, literacy groups of various stripes joined forces under an umbrella group known as "Lire et écrire". This was created in 1984 and coordinated the efforts of individual groups, partner associations and community "Lire et écrire" groups. It represented the literacy movement vis-à-vis government and, in the field, coordinated literacy worker training, directed new learners to literacy centres, promoted innovative methods in the groups and acted as a secretariat.

In no time the Namur umbrella group joined with other adult education organizations (e.g. social development schools, Office

national de l'emploi vocational training centres, the Centre d'enseignement namurois des arts et métiers, linked to the general high school program, Radio-télévision-animation and various continuing education movements) in an official structure, the Comité subrégional de l'emploi. This committee included, in addition to the education bodies, representatives of heads of companies, workers' organizations and the provincial government.

In the meantime, as a result of annual campaigns and based on observed requirements, new literacy groups sprang up all over the province (at Gembloux, Ciney, Dinant, Rochefort and Marche).

The Development of Synergy Between Associations and Government in the Province of Namur

The Namur umbrella group "Lire et écrire", faced with an increasing demand for training over a larger area and the requirement for funding beyond its means, invited the Province, in the person of the permanent delegate for policy management, to assume responsibility for training literacy workers.

It should be pointed out that each Belgian province has its own education network and a variety of provincial schools within its borders (The Francophone area of Belgium has four education networks: French Community education, communal education, provincial education and confessional education.) In Namur the "Cours pour éducateurs en fonction" [courses for working teachers], a provincial school for social development which trains teachers and literacy workers for the community association movement, already had contacts and worked jointly with the association wing of the continuing education movement, to which the Namur umbrella group, through the literacy groups, was indirectly linked.

When a training program for 1987 was proposed by the Namur umbrella group, the provincial permanent delegate agreed to a 150-hour pilot training module. Some ten literacy workers from all over the province were trained under this program. Actual training was given by experienced members of the continuing education movements and literacy workers from groups which already had four years experience; the project was funded by the provincial government.

The following year, with the co-operation of the Namur umbrella group, the province's courses for working teachers set up a new short-term training module recognized by the national department of education. Those who gave training were required to have national education qualifications and, at the end of the program, a certificate was awarded to those who had followed the courses. These two conditions mark official recognition of such training as part of the social development education network.

As in the preceding year, the team providing the actual training was made up of literacy group workers with several years' experience in the field, but with the required qualifications (social assistant - certified for secondary teaching). Introduction of this program marked the first official co-operation between, on the one hand the umbrella group and community literacy groups and, on the other hand, an administrative body (the provincial government) and a provincial social development school. The synergy between the community associations and publicly funded training for literacy workers has grown with each passing year. This year's group is made up of 18 individuals.

In 1989 the Namur umbrella group became a non-profit organization with the title "Lire et écrire Namur". In spite of its change in legal status, its responsibilities remain the same.

International Literacy Year in the Province of Namur or, How to Pave the Way for a Concerted Partnership Between Government and Community Associations

Lire et écrire Namur wanted to take all the opportunities provided by the celebration of an international year to promote literacy activities throughout the Province of Namur. Until 1989, literacy flourished only in towns with a population of over 15,000, leaving most of the province's small communes far behind.

Throughout this year, in which media and governments displayed growing interest in literacy action, Lire et écrire Namur prepared an awareness program aimed at three well-defined groups:

1. The provincial and communal authorities empowered to make decisions, assign funds and encourage interested parties to take

the action essential for the various needs of the literacy campaign;

2. The authorities of, and participants in, continuing education movements (associations) and the CPAS (commune level) throughout the province, as priority teams in the fight against illiteracy (CPAS: Centre public d'aide sociale [social assistance centre], a body responsible for keeping records on needy persons and granting financial assistance);

3. The population, to heighten awareness of the problem and ensure public cooperation in maintaining and supporting the illiterate and removing the stigma associated with their condition.

Our proposal entailed a description of the approach to government by Lire et écrire Namur, the means used to heighten awareness and the results thereof.

As we have seen, since 1987 there has been close co-operation on literacy worker training between the province, through social development instruction (Courses for working teachers) and the Namur umbrella group. Within the context of International Literacy Year, the province's permanent delegation was again the first to be contacted.

With a view to extending the awareness movement to the entire province, the permanent delegate responsible for instruction and education invited representatives of all the province's communes to a preliminary information meeting with Lire et écrire Namur. About 50 per cent of them, mainly commune councillors responsible for social affairs and education, and a few burgomasters, replied to the invitation in March 1990.

The awareness program for communal authorities is based on the extent of illiteracy in the province (supported by figures and estimates), the principal types of illiteracy encountered, and the experiences of the illiterate themselves. Emphasis was placed on the concept of citizenship. How can a person enjoy full citizenship without the means for self-expression, faced with the impossibility of exercising economic, social and cultural rights? Depriving an individual or group of access to reading and writing means depriving them of the means of political expression and the basic tools

required to participate in decisions which have implications for their present and future.

Literacy has emerged as the condition essential for the effective exercise of most of the rights proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Lire et écrire proposed to the authorities the text of a Namur Charter or Manifesto for a literacy campaign (see beginning of chapter). To summarize: through the Charter, the communes undertake to provide material support for literacy programs on their territory and to provide maximum cooperation with the various groups involved (CPAS social assistants, community associations, literacy groups).

It was decided that the Charter would be taken back to each commune, there to be presented to and discussed with the commune council. At the end of the deliberations, each commune would vote to decide on approval or rejection of the Charter.

Two months later, 22 of the 38 communes in the province returned the signed charter. The measures taken in the various communes were evaluated with a view to rendering the process more dynamic and encouraging the less motivated. Preliminary conclusions were drawn.

A second meeting of commune authorities was called jointly by the permanent delegate and Lire et écrire Namur. The communes which had taken action to implement the Charter reported on their progress. Some had organized information sessions jointly with Lire et écrire for target populations likely to be affected by illiteracy.

Meetings had been held, with the teachers and principals of communal schools, with physicians, with association boards, with advisors and CPAS social assistants, all aimed at concerted action toward a common goal. Other communes raised popular awareness through articles in local papers.

In a number of communes, the urgent need for education on the underlying causes of illiteracy and concrete possibilities for reintegration emerged. Lire et écrire Namur and the permanent delegate undertook to respond to the demand.

In October 1990 two one-day seminars on social integration, vocational training and illiteracy were organized for the communes who had signed the Charter. Participants included social workers, psychologists, teachers, educators, instructors and commune employees. The seminars were organized and presented by Belgian

and foreign experts. Program organization displayed the same positive synergy between community associations and government: three of its main participants were the Service d'études et de documentation sociale de la Province de Namur, Lire et écrire Namur, and the Cours pour éducateurs de la Province de Namur. Following the seminars, the Governor of the province and all the communal authorities involved came together for a symbolic signing of a memorable charter.

Beginning in September 1990, on the occasion of World Literacy Day, Lire et écrire Namur appealed to every individual involved in the province's associations to think in terms of the overall fight against illiteracy, make every effort to avoid competitive duplication, and give careful consideration to the multiple factors responsible for social exclusion.

Sixty-six associations responded to the appeal and, in a number of meetings, jointly drew up a white paper on social exclusion. The White Paper and the recommendations it contains were submitted to the permanent delegation. Following the meeting, it was decided that the White Paper would be studied at one of the delegation's official meetings and subsequently recommended to the communes.

Parallel to the awareness program, and no doubt as a result thereof, the number of learners jumped from 127 in January 1990 to 185 in January 1991, an increase of more than 45 per cent. Lire et écrire Namur is currently coordinating the activities of 24 literacy groups throughout the province.

To finance literacy programs throughout the province, stabilize even a few jobs (realizing that all the work rests on the shoulders of four ACS* workers and some twenty volunteers), it was essential in the long run to consolidate all the energy available, to focus all the region's forces, toward the common objective: the fight against illiteracy. As explained above, the associations and the provincial and communal governments and related services consolidated their efforts under the Charter. What remained was to motivate other potential partners (businesses, banks, universities) and recruit them to the cause.

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* Agent contractuel subventionné [subsidized contract worker]: worker status created by Belgian legislation to counteract unemployment.

The Fondation Émile Lacroix, named after a former governor, was established for the purpose. Its objectives are to:

- develop the fight against illiteracy within the framework of an overall course of action to fight social exclusion;

- support the literacy activities of Lire et écrire by providing human and financial resources;

- jointly with Lire et écrire, coordinate action at the commune level aimed at implementing the content of the Charter;

- promote joint literacy projects (e.g. CPAS, Lire et écrire, other movements);

- sponsor literacy program funding drives;

- organize an annual month-long intensive campaign on the problem of illiteracy;

- promote and subsidize production of papers, books and research on the subject of literacy; and

- organize public gatherings (e.g. concerts, sports events, galas) to promote literacy.

A number of prominent companies in the Province of Namur have shown interest in responding to this appeal. It is our hope that universities and banks will follow in their footsteps. The local development which results from expanding the scope of literacy programs is far greater than the sum of its social, educational, cultural, political and economic parts. It is an aggregate incorporating all the links, interactions and complementarity among partners, which focuses and intensifies the joint efforts toward social reintegration and the well-being of a human community.

Conclusion

The construction of a partnership between Lire et écrire Namur, various continuing education movements, provincial and communal governments and authorities and workers in the field (group leaders, educators, social assistants, teachers, physicians, family workers) seems to have been a long process.

In 1985 Namur already had an official structure, the Comité subrégional de l'emploi, made up of persons responsible for adult education organizations (e.g. continuing education movements, Office national de l'emploi, schools for social development), representatives of business, workers and regional authorities working toward the common goal of developing local employment.

By 1986 Lire et écrire Namur (formerly "la coordination namuroise") became a key player in the existing structure when it drew up a five-point strategy for local members of the partnership:

1. making its own action and that of the various literacy groups official;

2. consolidating that action with regional employment and training programs;

3. filling in existing gaps in the region which have a negative impact on the under-educated;

4. spending time with workers in the field, taking part in their discussions, getting to know them, with a view to gaining an overall picture of existing resources and potential; and

5. establishing co-operative links, setting up joint programs conducted by specific partners (provincial school of social development/provincial government).

The fact that Lire et écrire was able to penetrate the excessively official structure of the Comité subrégional de l'emploi can undoubtedly be attributed to its introduction by all the region's continuing education movements, which supported literacy groups or conducted literacy projects and were already firmly established within the structure.

The excellent relationship with the provincial school of social development, and thus with the province, is also based on prior co-operation by "Lire et écrire" with the school (which trains social educators and socio-cultural group leaders) and with the entire fabric of regional associations. "Lire et écrire Namur" has based all its activities on the already solid foundation of co-operative action. To this it was able to add an understanding of the field, and the experience and local presence of its leaders, who included a number of group leaders from the continuing education movement well established in Namur. Lire et écrire, through its constituent literacy groups and associations, already had a reputation for stressing the fundamental requirements of pluralism and complementarity, transcending competition and ideological differences.

Since 1985 the strategy has entailed contact and co-operation among a variety of partners, focused on a concrete objective. This common thread runs through training programs for literacy workers, the Charter campaign associated with International Literacy Year, the wording of the White Paper on social exclusion, one-day seminars on social integration and, finally, establishment of the Lacroix Fondation.

Each individual involved became personally committed to the cause, quite apart from the interests of the association, government or other body represented. In this community process, each one had something to contribute: at one end of the scale, a voluntary literacy worker or continuing education movement representative who works on the White Paper on social exclusion and thus gains new awareness of the necessity for joint action and setting aside the old local quarrels which can still set one association against another; at the other, a social affairs councillor or teacher returning to his or her commune imbued with the message of the Charter and making personal contacts to mobilize an entire local network of professionals and interested citizens engaged in solving the problem (e.g. social assistance centre advisors, commune employees, teachers, physicians, social workers).

Successful completion of a number of steps is no excuse to rest on our laurels. On the contrary, the challenge now is to bring the literacy campaign into the farthest regions of the countryside. Although there is no denying the importance of the geographic expansion of literacy and anti-illiteracy programs, a more in-depth

approach to the persons responsible for education, culture and social affairs is even more important.

The job will not be done unless industry and commerce become involved in this enormous plan of action for the right to education. Companies are invited to contribute to the collective effort aimed at implementing the declaration, "The Right to Learn", adopted in 1985 by the Fourth International UNESCO Conference on Adult Education:

> Recognition of the right to learn is now more than ever a major challenge for humanity.
>
> The right to learn is:
> the right to read and write;
> the right to question and analyse;
> the right to imagine and create;
> the right to read one's own world and to write history;
> the right to have access to educational resources;
> the right to develop individual and collective skills

and, we may add, to read the truth and master one's environment.

Training is indispensable to the smooth operation of public and private companies, which are investing ever-increasing amounts of time and money in a broad range of training programs, none of which can be effective unless the workers are sufficiently well grounded in the basics. Making companies aware of the illiteracy problem and of the need to invest in a solution is an important aspect of the work to be done over the next decade. This assumes that literacy must be the first step in the long training process aimed at resocializing and qualifying the individual for a job, thus making him or her a better citizen.

A number of courses of action for the future are open. The following paragraphs give an overview of the White Paper on social exclusion[4]:

- sponsoring a permanent statistical record of factors and figures related to social exclusion in the province; this record would enable ongoing adjustment of policies aimed at combating social exclusion on the basis of local needs;

- transmitting to interested government bodies the pressing demand, throughout the Province of Namur, for an increase in the means (jobs and funding) for literacy purposes;

- in programs of study for future teachers (teacher training colleges), including awareness and information modules about the problem of exclusion, a corollary of dropping out which begins in the school, and about the illiteracy phenomenon in general;

- supporting rural schools and schools which play an integrated role in neighbourhood life;

- bringing parents into the school education process, especially in immigrant and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and setting up pilot projects for schools that are an integral part of neighbourhood or village life;

- setting up literacy and personal development courses close to the homes of marginal populations (e.g. CPAS, shelters, homes for unwed mothers, food banks);

- with regard to job integration, reinforcing the participation of workers' organizations in educating the most disadvantaged job seekers; and

- creating a broader network of information and guidance centres for existing programs, patterned on the COISP (Centre d'orientation et d'insertion socio-professionnelle) model .

This is only a small sample of the proposals to be implemented in the years to come. The success of these projects will demand a great deal of concerted effort and co-operation between the authorities and associations.

In the last analysis, government is responsible for education and literacy. The response to the requirements of the population and the various problems of social exclusion depend on political decisions. It is the duty of government to ensure, by seeking appropriate solutions, that the education provided satisfactorily meets the needs of today and tomorrow.

Each individual is invited to take an interest in literacy, either illiteracy prevention or implementing after-school programs set up to combat the devastation caused by this social scourge. Governments must feel bound to take up the challenge; the future of society and of democracy is at stake. Although the task is enormous, the outlook is promising: the experiences reported on these pages augur well for the future.

As the Director General of UNESCO has said, "Each new reader is a soul that can be mobilized to combat the syndrome of privation, inequality, sickness, and other problems to which illiteracy contributes" (unofficial translation).

Creating a world, a region, a province where illiteracy is unknown may be a long shot; it is not, however, an impossible dream. We know what must be done. We must step up the rhythm and work together even harder.

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3. Kestelyn, Catherine. 1988. La campagne d'alphabétisation dans la communauté française de Belgique. In Jean-Paul Hautecoeur, ed. *Alpha 1988*. Montreal: Quebec Ministry of Education.

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URGENTLY REQUIRED: IMAGINATION
A WRITING COMPETITION

Francesco Azzimonti
CLAP, Rhône-Alpes, Lyon, France

IF I HAD IN WRITING

If I had in writing the history of my people,

If I had in writing the story of my birth,
from my mother, storm, war, bicycle, fatigue,
work, anxiety, spasm, rain, seven months,
incubator.

If I had in writing gossip from my
neighbourhood, stories about this house, its
children, its women and their lovers. And
the dead too.

If I had in writing the songs of girls shouted
across the fields, and the response of the
boys from the other side.

If I had in writing the story of bread earned,
and of the darkened hands of my father, of
the wine he coveted, of the firewood and
coal, feet warming by the oven, hard boiled
eggs and bitter salad.

If I had in writing the history of a family,
ordinary people, and their passion to improve,
WHAT WOULD I BE READING TODAY?

F.A.

THE BLUE ORANGE*

Once upon a time, a little blond prince lived in a country full of flowers and fruits of all colours and all flavours. He didn't have to travel far: in his garden, there could be found virtually every kind of flower and fruit from the other countries of the world. And all day long in his garden, many boys and girls of all colours from every country strolled and played.

But he, the little prince who was to succeed his father at a later date, was not allowed to stroll in the garden; he could only look at it out of his window. At night, when everything was quiet, he would secretly get up to look through the window at the sleeping flowers and the fruits, with their interplay of fragrances. The little prince was always locked up in his rooms, because he tirelessly had to study and learn, and take one course after another in preparation for being first in the kingdom in due course. He learned grammar and spelling, about the stars and about electronics, he practised foreign languages and learned all the codes of etiquette. He was surrounded by dictionaries and papers, pencils and erasers, pocket calculators and computers, and had wise people all around him to instruct him well and to make sure that he did his homework and learned his lessons. Everything around him was grey.

From time to time, this little prince saw (or dreamed?) between the pages of the books and the keys of the computers, a kind of bubble, like an orange, but of a funny shade, close to dark blue, sometimes with all kinds of colour gradations mixed together.

Little by little, this blue orange-like bubble would appear when he looked through the window into his garden. He was told that he was perhaps colour-blind. He didn't bother to search in his books to see what this meant exactly; he found it so pleasant to see the world in colour that he came to the conclusion that if this was what being colour-blind meant, he would become so willingly. Thus every day he tried a little harder to place his blue orange bubble everywhere to see the world, and discovered soon enough that he could see the changing colours of the flowers and fruits in his garden, the striking variety of faces on the boys and girls who were playing in the garden. He could combine green,

* A story by the author in *Clap Info-bulletin Rhône-Alpes* No. 23/24, February-March 1990

red, orange, sky blue, and purple, and even invent subtle shades that had never been seen before. He discovered that it was really worth the trouble to look at reality with rules and colours that deviated somewhat from the grey monotony of his books, his machines and his teachers.

He took his pens and his pencils, his pocket calculators and his computers, his dictionaries and his grammars, went through the window and descended into the garden. When he arrived, all his pencils had become paintbrushes and coloured felt-tip pens, all his books and machines had become painter's palettes containing all the colours of the rainbow. That is when he began to write and to paint, along with his friends, stories that were full of colour, in which were intermingled travels and tales, proverbs and magic formulae, adventures of men and animals, numbers and letters, drawings and poems.

Colour was everywhere, and everywhere in the garden people could write as they pleased. The little prince showed everyone how to see the world in colour, green-red-orange-gold-blue-purple, and how it was possible to find happiness by writing using colours, and signs of rage and gentleness, passion and fatigue, tears and smiles, memories and anticipation, analysis and love.

Franco

The Comité de liaison pour l'alphabétisation et la Promotion (CLAP) [Literacy and development liaison committee]

The story of CLAP in France

For many years now, the Comité de liaison pour l'alphabétisation et la promotion (CLAP) has had an innovative approach to working with the illiterate and the uneducated: it does not confine the illiterate within a framework of technical and purely linguistic problems, but sets all learning in a context that encourages personal and collective development.

In France, CLAP has grown significantly over a 20-year period, along with the changes that have taken place in French society with respect to the phenomenon of migration and the dynamics of social and employment integration. At the beginning, in 1968, a handful of associations wanted to have a common tool, a liaison committee,

to support their efforts to provide literacy education to adult immigrants who were uneducated or who had very little education in their own language; the needs of these people were first dealt with by teaching them to read and write in French, in order to make them comfortable in their new living environment.

Over the years, the network grew. On the national, regional and local levels, including federations of voluntary community associations, the associations that belonged to CLAP worked in information, training, the social, professional and cultural development of immigrants and French men and women, in the battle against discrimination, and in encouraging genuine socialization.

CLAP's goals became broader as it adopted the issues dealt with by member associations: developing literacy education, fostering the social and professional development of foreigners and people who are culturally excluded from society, fighting racism and working towards building an intercultural society. The Committee's primary objective was to support immigration requirements with respect to:

- training and developing immigrants, in particular the battle against illiteracy, which is a key area in the fight against social exclusion,

- cultural expression, the rights of different cultures, and education in languages of origin,

- genuine recognition of the civil rights of immigrants and their organizations.

The steps taken by the Committee to meet these objectives included:

- combining and coordinating the efforts of member associations throughout France,

- facilitating exchanges of information and experience among all groups of individuals pursuing common goals, and establishing centres for literacy education and development everywhere the need was felt;

- performing a role as a research and information centre on appropriate pedagogical and instructional methods and, where applicable, conducting experiments;

- enhancing awareness about the socio-cultural problems experienced by disadvantaged groups, and making the public aware of their problems;

- approaching public authorities, communities and other agencies in any way that might contribute to meeting its goals;

- encouraging the creation of regional committees to strengthen its effectiveness and develop closer ties with various associations;

- publishing a periodical journal, developing pedagogical tools, and implementing all necessary information activities.

Now that it has resolutely joined the ranks of those associations, movements and agencies devoted to fighting social exclusion in France, CLAP can now, on the strength of its early experience, become involved in local urban and rural development. Penetrating this field, which is a prime target for dynamic initiatives, highlights the need to support local associations, neighbourhood groups, and even to train development officers. The introduction of the Revenu minimum d'insertion (RMI - Basic Integration Income) along with the job integration contract for participants, underscore still further the priority assigned to this type of action. This new living and working space in neighbourhoods and communes has become, along with schools, one of the best places from which to demarginalize people, to bring outsiders in. The manner in which CLAP has developed its objectives and its practices stems from the changing context and the needs expressed by the associations and publics concerned. It must continue its efforts through new forms of intervention that have yet to be devised and implemented.

Significant phases

1978. The General Assembly debated a report on proposals for a public training network for adults in France. The General Assembly

agreed to the gradual implementation of a public training network that would exist at all levels (local, regional, national):

- agencies to carry out training activities
- grass-roots organizations and movements (social partners, particularly union organizations)
- migrants' organizations, which assumes that all impediments to the free exercise of expression and association to which immigrants are victims have been eliminated
- governments and public authorities.

This public network should be decentralized to the greatest possible extent, should receive a public mission from governments, and be capable in the longer term of playing a role in more general forms of continuing education relevant to all adult nationals or foreigners, without necessarily doing away with the special requirements of immigrant training.

1981. "Towards an intercultural society: living together is possible". The General Assembly's motion was hopeful about progress on the immigration front, and signalled that it would be monitoring the situation. The notion of "people in transit" no longer made sense; the migrant phenomenon was treated as "structural". This, however, was something that a large percentage of French society refused to accept. The community association movement had to take into account the facts of a rapidly expanding economic environment, a difficult social context, contradictions that surface within the immigrant communities themselves, and political change. The General Assembly recommended a genuine integration of immigrants into a network of social relations, a fundamental policy whose first goal was to be demarginalization. Mindful of this, suggestions were made about what kinds of action to take to remove the major obstacles to progress towards a multicultural society.

1985. The General Assembly, under the discussion topic of "CLAP and youth", placed an emphasis on the need to give due consideration to the association movement as perceived by young people, who

were questioning society, and affirmed its resolve to develop practices that would meet the needs and aspirations of the movement. More concretely, matters like training, culture, the free association of young people, partnership relations, the great need for debate in society and the many issues involved, were discussed.

While CLAP had been in favour of a UNESCO symposium in January 1983 on the topic "Towards an intercultural society", a one-day European conference was held in October 1985 at UNESCO entitled "Monitoring change with a view to action and training".

1988. Towards CLAP in the 90s. The General Assembly policy motion defined a two-pronged Mediterranean and European approach in the context of the implications of the Single European Act.

The Rhône-Alpes CLAP and the Writing Competition

For the whole of the Rhône-Alpes region, CLAP is a place where over fifty associations can meet to discuss and deliberate. It functions essentially with association organizers and members, as well as with educators and social workers, who in our opinion have the potential to effect social change that would make it possible to acquire recognition for, and to improve the lot of, disadvantaged groups, who have a role to play in society now and in the future. Promoting and fostering diversity, doing things "through" and "with" mediators to create a process of change and development for groups and individuals, is the overall purpose of the Rhône-Alpes team.

The idea of a writing competition for people who do not know how to write well was certainly consistent with the logic of celebrating International Literacy Year by, for once, giving those who cannot write, whether French or immigrants, an opportunity to speak and to write, for they are too readily labelled uneducated or illiterate. By urging them "to enter into the world of writing by writing", CLAP Rhône-Alpes wanted to give the battle against illiteracy a living and real face. There is an urgent need for innovation in efforts to deal with illiteracy and literacy education. The contest was far removed from any efforts to provide assistance, because the "illiterates" were asked not only to write, but also, more specifically, to take themselves in hand, and actually express their own desires and thoughts. It was therefore open to all adults who "have things to say, who would like to write, but who have never

dared". It also accepted any form of writing (stories, correspondence, poems, proverbs, tales). It was broad enough to allow everyone enough room to meet the challenge in a manner commensurate with their ability.

The project had three primary objectives:

- to make illiterates and uneducated people the producers and the target audience of written matter. To allow people to use their heads and their hands to mobilize the communication resources that they have kept bottled up. They certainly have, given their history and their imaginations, some meaning to express. There are also certainly some ways that they will be able to find, commit themselves to, and develop, in making the transition to a written form;

- through this, to create a climate conducive to creativity at the regional level, to encourage those who did not know how to write to express themselves and to communicate. To suggest networks where those involved would themselves be able to use speech and the pen, and thus go beyond mediation through an official standardized culture and through the delegation of knowledge to educators and social workers;

- to use the occasion to spur a renewal of pedagogical methods in the region, by making it possible for educators and learners to confront the dynamics of producing written work, in which both learning and creativity intermingle.

The regional initiative very quickly became national in scope. At the end of six months, we received a large number of texts: approximately 1,000 persons were mobilized to write throughout France, and about 500 submissions were received. Some were written by individuals, some by groups, some in pairs, and some by families. We attempted to reply personally or as a group to each submission, and asked them to join a writing exchange network. To each, we also suggested that they begin to work with us on reading further submissions: each person was sent the "competition journal", along with the additional submissions as we received them.

Among the submissions, 60 were selected for prizes in various categories: the gifts they received were books, to allow them to

continue on their writing adventures. Among the 60, 25 won a trip to and a stay in Paris. An honorary writing jury, composed of Azouz Begag, Laabi Abdellatif and Michèle Reverbel, awaited them to celebrate the pleasure of having written something, and to encourage them to continue to write. A "writing" certificate was given to each, and sent to other winners, signed by the President of CLAP, by a representative of UNESCO, and by the writer Azouz Begag. Emotions in the room were high, for various reasons: the speeches made by the VIPs in attendance, the announcement of the nominees and the awarding of prizes, the reading of a number of the submissions, and the speeches made by the "winners". Writing is an act of love that it was also necessary to celebrate in public: even dreams sometimes need their own theatre.

The lessons learned from the Writing Competition

After introducing this initiative and shepherding it through to its conclusion, I found it necessary to think about and to attempt to understand my "writing aid" efforts (through following up with literacy courses, training educators, direct contacts with persons experiencing problems) and to draw the first lessons to be learned from this "contest". It was also useful to identify a number of theoretical landmarks that guided us along the way.[1]

A wager

Learning to read and write is not a preliminary to training, employment or action. On the contrary, it accompanies all procedures used for social, cultural or economic integration that alone give meaning to the written word.

The uneducated are not without resources: it is necessary to abandon a defensive view of "a battle" against a handicap, and to act instead on the basis of a social transformation and personal development.

It is necessary to renew pedagogical practices, to make it possible for educators and learners to abandon exercises that simulate the school experience, and to confront the requirements of producing written work that can be communicated in a social context.

Our answer was a writing competition for people who do not know how to write, and a proposal to adults who think and say that they are unable to write:

- you have an interesting background and you have things to say,

- you can find new ways to prepare something in writing about this experience that is unique to you. We leave it to you to deal with the problems involved in making the transition to putting it in written form.

In return, a commitment: to publish the submissions (competition journal) and to give them a prize (that is to say value), real prizes, though admittedly modest.

The competition proposed by CLAP was fairly open-ended - its configuration was in part anticipated at the outset, and then modified in terms of the dynamic established by the participants:

- a vertical dimension related to the very essence of the competition: to write, to send and await the results of a reading committee, to undergo a selection process, to receive prizes for reading-writing - a trip and a stay in Paris, or books, a commitment to continue to read.[2]

- a horizontal dimension: to enter into the reading-writing relational dynamic, i.e. to send in written work, to receive mail, to be published in the "writing newsletter", to read the submissions of other writers, to communicate with them in writing, etc.[3]

Learning

From April to June 1990, the proposal was put forward and implemented: approximately 500 submissions were sent in from just about everywhere in France. Some were written by individuals, and some came from groups or from people involved in a training program.

If there are lessons to be drawn, they include both writing and the status of the participants. In spite of the problems involved in writing, people did write: this gives us something to think about with respect to the barriers, background, conditions, and staged

learning requirements often given for not writing. In spite of social and professional problems, these people did write: this also gives us something to think about, because through the competition, or through a thousand other similar efforts, people felt authorized to speak and to write, felt recognized, appreciated and listened to (see the many letters of thanks received). The people who wrote spoke about themselves or about issues they hold dear.[4]

It is possible. They did write.

It is possible to write, even if one does not know how to write well. And the work involved was arduous: first draft, corrections, sending it in by mail, reply, reading the mail, discussions, dialogue; the competition journal arrives, and then there are published submissions, more submissions to read, more writing to be done, etc. A thousand persons (whom we call illiterate or uneducated) dared to write: they did not wait until they knew how to write well, they did not wait until they had completed their courses.

Who are these people?

- the vast majority were women (does this reflect a status? does this reflect attendance at literacy courses?);
- age: the majority were between 20 and 40 years of age (but there was also a very high percentage in the 50-60 age group and over 60 - up to age 86! - and there were some under 20 years of age);
- ethnic origin (in order of priority): the vast majority were people from the Maghreb, followed by Portugal, South-east Asia, France, black Africa and Turkey, Latin America, and, lastly, from various European countries.

Special characteristics

The majority of those who wrote prepared their work either in social integration courses in their neighbourhoods, or personally.

Then came those involved in job training courses or enrolled in Ateliers pédagogiques personnalisés (APP - personal pedagogical workshops) or in specific programs like the Crédit formation individualisé (CFI - individualized training credits).

Next came those who attended various social institutions (youth centres, reception centres, community centres, etc.).

Then came persons from specific environments: the mentally handicapped, the physically handicapped, those undergoing psychiatric treatment, gypsies, those receiving the Basic Integration Income (RMI - Revenu minimum d'insertion), and prisoners.

The final category included former literacy course trainees.

How did they go about writing?

The answer is that to write, even if one does not know how to write well, is possible in a thousand different ways. It is not a matter of linear progression or specific methods, but simply of daring to begin to write.

The first step is to overcome fear, and to dare to begin to place things on a blank sheet of paper, and to give shape to one's ideas; and then to negotiate the rules and standards of spelling, grammar and readability; and then to communicate, to send it to others, to receive a reply, to establish a circuit and networks; and then to continue, to improve, etc.

It is true that many of the submissions were prepared while people were taking courses or undergoing training, and showed evidence of group work: this reflected the many people involved in such undertakings, and mirrored the manner in which the educators worked. It was a necessary starting point, like any other.

Many of the submissions were very descriptive, whether about the current unemployed status of the writer, the course being taken by the trainee, or departure from the home country. Once again, description can be an important trigger to leading people to write, and to begin the effort required - one among others.

From all the submissions received, the six categories we were able to identify gave us an inkling of the various approaches that could be taken to writing when a person does not know how to write well; a variety of approaches, to suit a variety of personal agendas:

* beginning writing:
lines, signatures, exclamations, colours, sometimes drawings, something personal marked on a page, short faltering sentences, a hesitant pen;

* writing with others:
a group effort, with various small sections written by different people, finished efforts with photographs, on a computer, large format work, posters, small brochures produced in house, collages and drawings, each time bearing the distinctive mark of their authors;

* writing by others:
obtaining help from the family, children, grandchildren, husbands, neighbours. Work written by several hands: on a typewriter, on a computer, someone correcting an error, someone who completely retranscribes work which is later submitted for correction. And sometimes, help from the educator too;

* developing writing:
small texts are prepared, a few lines or a whole page are developed, there is some sequence of ideas and I speak about myself, my departure from my country, I describe my current situation, I introduce myself, I describe what I see around me;

* writing that takes wing:
progress is made, and confidence acquired; sentiments, impressions and thoughts are expressed, there is poetry in the air, the pen seems to write by itself, and something heartfelt is put onto paper;

* writing that liberates:
there are many things to say, personal pain and joy, events that are provocative - and the pen does not always have the capacity to express it; sometimes there is awkwardness, a large number of mistakes, it is not really like that but the desire to say something and to put it in writing is there. A certain freedom is acquired by writing, even though perfection is not attained.

And some people, after working on their first text, move from one category to another: the important thing is to know that there is more than one possible path, and that there are several registers in which to enter into and advance in the world of writing.

What are they about?

If a person does not know how to write well, but has something to say, then he or she should go ahead. Writing techniques should not

be an impediment to anyone who wants to say something about himself or herself, or for someone who wants to send a message to others (whether within the context of a writing competition or not).

No topics were given as guidelines. A cursory glance (which will have to be replaced by a more careful study of the submissions) reveals the following topics, in order of priority:

- a desire to learn, to learn to read and to write (a number of thematic opposites reappear significantly: shadow/light, night/day, walking/not walking),

- narratives about life, about emigration, about current living conditions,

- solitude, sadness, neglect, distress,

- messages of love, affection (and a tiny bit of eroticism, on occasion),

- poetic dreams about one's country, one's home, the environment, but also about inner feelings and passions,

- thoughts about current events (world situation, racism, peace),

- a personal cry, mark, or signature ("I am happy to be able to write because I can shout out my story". "I would like to take a book in my hands". "Hurray, I am happy. Fatima"...).

Comments

At first glance, making the transition to writing appears to be the major obstacle. This is very often said by educators (they do not know how to write, it's too difficult, they'll never manage - writing is not for them - it's too early, they are just beginning). It is also very often felt and expressed by the writers themselves (I do not know how to write, one has to know how to write well, and if I make mistakes, and if it's not nice, writing is not for me).

What are the impediments to making the transition to writing?[5] Most often, these attitudes stem from:

* A concept of language and language learning as a form of "putting into words" (whether oral or written) of something that is already there in thought, of events. Writers write about events that they have previously seen (like a painter painting a model).

The problems encountered by adults in writing lead us rather to an opposed view: that language is not an instrument that someone begins to learn in order to communicate with the environment afterwards. An individual organizes himself or herself by learning, people organize themselves through language and within a language.

* The concept of "apprentices": according to this view, there are people "who do not know", and who one fine day, through the use of the correct method, a proper sequencing of learning and proper technical training, suddenly "know".

Wrong. People learn by doing, by speaking, by writing. It is not experience that organizes expression, but expression that organizes experience.[6] I only remember and memorize that which I plan to use again.[7]

* A concept of "writing": reading and writing, according to some people, are interconnected, through an analytical or syllabic method, and involve a comprehensive approach according to others. We are all aware of the battles raging around these pedagogical methods, and are familiar with the titles of the books that are very often used in courses.

We commend the Association française pour la lecture (AFL - French reading association) in particular, and other French and Canadian authors, for having described the essential processes involved in reading as it relates to a search for meaning, to the formulation of hypotheses, to anticipation, and to communication. There is no need for me to describe these again; I wish simply to underscore the importance of socialization and communication in making the transition to writing, which makes it possible to prepare people to be both capable of writing and of reading written material.

People learn to write because they have something to say to someone. People learn to read when they are interested in what others may have written, etc. It is a matter of learning to read by writing, in real life situations, and learning to read by reading, also in real life situations.

> When an adult experiences problems in expressing himself or herself, either orally or in writing, what we are seeing is evidence, sometimes scars, of early education both in the family and at school. Problems with the language system are often no more than surface manifestations of difficulties in asserting oneself, of speaking in the first person.[8]

* The gamble we took with the competition showed us clearly that people, large numbers of people, dared to use the first person and to take pen and pencil in hand. Now that they have taken the first step towards addressing the "I" on their own behalf, comes the need to approach a deeper social "I" through exchanges of writing, which is one of the significant side benefits of the competition.

- A reading and writing network is now being established: people continue to write to CLAP, people are beginning to write to one another about various items published in the competition journal, and people seek out others who have written in the same city, or within the same association.

- Local initiatives have begun to take shape: a neighbourhood newspaper, a course newsletter, an association journal, and it is possible to exchange these between cities, between neighbourhoods and between associations.

- Regional and local follow-up centres have been set up: Toulouse celebrated the writing competition by handing out a special Midi-Pyrénées prize; Marseille and Nice are preparing to publish the submissions; Grenoble, Lyon, and Saint-Étienne are considering setting up writing meetings between those who have written, who have travelled, and others who are just now embarking on the adventure. Other associations celebrated the success of their candidates in the competition in their own way, and are considering pursuing research into writing. The Rhône-Alpes region is going to launch a regional writing competition. For 1991, the competition will be held nationally and in several regions of France.

- The competition journal will continue to be the permanent link between all those who dare to write, and it will regularly publish competition submissions and be used as a basis for dialogue, both

within families and among trainees. It has even become a learning aid for those taking courses. Perhaps we will manage to publish an attractive brochure to showcase the writing efforts of the many contributors who had previously been unable to write.

* Learning to write is essentially centred on conformity to a social and, it must be admitted, very often a school-oriented standard. Hence endless questions were asked about the competition: But what about spelling? And mistakes, do they have to be corrected? Can I rewrite the effort submitted? I'll prepare the fair copy myself. It's not nice, what shall I do? etc.

And "when the written work does not meet all the too precise external criteria (administrative writing, progress reports, exercises based on techniques or even styles that are too precise such as short stories and novels, etc.) the writers establish their own guidelines, their own constraints, their own standards." "Writing truly becomes working on one's own self, and on one's way of thinking and living in the world."[9] The search for personal standards is certainly related to the multiplicity of genres selected: some favour poetry, others biography, yet others songs, letters, a short history, a current affairs essay, a philosophical discourse, a message of sadness or joy, a story, a reformulation of proverbs, etc. It is as if each individual worked on his submission as a function of his or her own representations of the thing written, and as a function of the words that came from the very heart or being (not to mention the stereotypes that everyone may have about such literary genres and the influence of the educator and perhaps his working group). But the personal touch is obvious in all the submissions received. Spelling and mistakes were not important criteria in determining the worth of the written submissions. Each individual worked out the rules for his or her own efforts.

* This is where the important role of a helper, or third party comes in. We are often asked, "Is this all right? Is this correct? Do you understand? Is this readable?" Confidence in the educator, potent and sometimes limitless, can make those he is teaching happy, but can also make them afraid: "What must an author do to learn that speaking and writing always involve negotiating the impossible concordance of self to self, and self to others..., writing is always

giving birth to one's inner being in suffering... but also in pleasure."[10] One woman who took part in the competition, Mrs. Djellouli, used the concept of giving birth to express the idea: "I have found, since beginning to write, that it affects me like childbirth - painful and marvellous. It is difficult to write about myself and also to know that I will be read. Thank you for your encouragement."

Uncertainties and Proposals

Linking the learning of writing to a writing competition is no easy matter: there is a risk of creating the star syndrome, giving people the idea that they are on the brink of writing careers and that publication, distribution, appearances on literary television shows and celebrity are imminent.

It is true that people need to be motivated to write, and that an increase in self-esteem is also to be expected, but what is essential in all of this is that a network for dialogue and written communications should be maintained, and that impossible dreams, which several of the participants harbour, should not be encouraged.

Most likely, it is in the concrete side-effects in the various communities and training groups that the adventure will be able to continue and consolidate itself.

An initial risk that appeared was that of working essentially in groups and submitting group efforts. Although the process of writing with others is one possible introduction to the world of writing, it is not sufficient and not something that ought to be continued forever. Writing is a thoroughly personal act, and it is something that must lead us to find our own path, our own distinctiveness, and our own way of speaking, which becomes part of a process of reciprocal change and writing networks within a training group that is open to the outside world.

A second risk is relying too heavily on stereotypes people may have about writing and reinforcing them: I like to write poems, I write nothing but poems. I present myself and tell about my life. I describe what goes on during the course. I speak about my country." Discovering different ways of writing and different contents is also a way to advance and to learn - to compare, to confront, and to try another way, to take a risk.

There are two major stumbling blocks: the first cry, the first effort is not necessarily a precious object that warrants veneration at all costs. While writing is a path, the path is pitted with comments, corrections, and revisions recommended by the reader of the first draft, which is sometimes beautiful and finished, but more often needs improvement and refinement. And at the same time, the fear of making mistakes can paralyse us, and the observance of the canonical rules of writing can slow us or even render us powerless. Spelling and syntactical concerns have their role to play in ultimately producing a readable text that can be communicated.

The third risk resides in the attitude of the teacher or trainer. We were often asked, "Can somebody help me write?" And the educators responded, "But it's impossible, they don't know how to write, they are still learning... they still make too many mistakes... this is not for them... what shall I do?". The negative effects that educators can have is not negligible. They are often the ones who have the power to open or close the door, to erect mountains of problems or to move mountains to launch an adventure.

In all probability, each educator falls back on his own methods, and his instructional theories. To being with, is he ready for work that can be somewhat upsetting? Can he identify what are his own relationships with writing... Can he see himself as a mediator-guide to helping others write? The positive reports we have received lead us to suggest that it is essential for people to be themselves, and above all to like writing. It follows that everyone will need others.

Interesting pedagogical processes came to light in the written reports submitted by educators when they gambled on trying to teach writing without being afraid of committing themselves to a way that was somewhat off the beaten path. A positive role can be played by educators in mediation when they themselves take the risk of writing, and when they locate themselves precisely in the process as readers of material produced by others and as guides to others in producing written material.

What is to be done? The question is open, but the spadework has been done

* Places for writing: if writing becomes part of a creative process for non-writers, for those who do not write a lot, and for those who write poorly, to express themselves, then the sorts of places need to

be found where people can produce writing, polish their efforts, make corrections, review what has been written, compare themselves to others, attempt to meet standards, make progress in expressing their ideas, feelings and aspirations. These are just about everywhere - in associations, in training centres, in libraries, and in various permanent facilities (employment, children, adults) - workshops for writing and expression are needed, and appropriate pedagogical methods have to be found.

* Writing helpers or "facilitators": the educator's profile will increasingly become that of someone who helps others to express themselves, who eases the production of written work, who reads and responds to prepared texts, who places people in contact with other writers, who opens up the treasures of writing to them, who accompanies them to places for writing and reading, who puts personal texts in a social context, who raises self-esteem, who suffers along with the writers to make their work intelligible and capable of being communicated.

* Writing networks: communication is never a one-way street. We know today the extent to which exchanges of knowledge and experience play an important role in learning. Likewise, we learn by imparting what we know to others, and we read when we ourselves become writers after a fashion. We are recognized because we are read, and recognized because others correct us; others take an interest in us, we can communicate with others, sometimes our peers, sometimes people who are different from us. All of this occurs when people begin to do relational writing.

Conclusion

To succeed in writing

The deciding factor is that people see themselves as authors-writers.

It is essential to place an emphasis on production rather than on accepting or copying models or rules.

The production of written work frequently takes place within a communications network (for friends, within the family, as a member

of a literacy group or a training group, but also for a broader public, such as a neighbourhood, town, etc.).

The texts produced are all related to a unique life experience (remembrances, thoughts, feelings, dreams about the past, present or the future).

There can be pleasure and joy, even when the problems are many, and not everything is solved at one go.

To continue to write

Written work is satisfying and attractive. Each piece of writing has value and deserves a "prize".

A piece of writing needs to be reworked, and improved, because others may read it, respond to it, and because other people write differently, etc.

It must be possible for written work to have a social point, to become a continuing communication activity (community newspapers, collections, correspondence with other writers, and a spilling-over into other language situations or ways in which people act in their milieu).

If we believe that certain people are not capable of writing, and if this assumption is one of the methods used to keep these people in their place, then the ideal would be to prevent them from writing anything at all. If you open the door just a crack, and if you believe they are capable, then you must take the risk that they will enter the "palace".

It is in fact dangerous to say that all of what the trainees write is wonderful, as it was put onto paper the first time. Workshop finishing (to refine, to polish, etc.) is needed. A start is made, but it is necessary to rewrite, to check, to improve.

Writing is an interesting adventure, but one with limitations: you can't make every one believe that he or she will become an author. If writing has to do with oneself and with the world around us, then the adventure can also continue in non-written forms (assuming responsibilities, creating associations, being involved in the community, establishing new family relations).

Changing the role of the educator is the deciding factor in establishing and running active centres for writing and interesting communication networks.

Three suggestions

1. People who are uneducated, people who are illiterate, have written. I have given an overview of our project and identified a number of signposts.

   I know that writing can be a process that raises questions and that requires an analysis of situations relating to the experience specific to disadvantaged adults.

   How can the fact that these people wrote, and how can the manner in which they wrote, yield findings useful to research? What role can those who have learned how to write play in analyzing and defining the way in which they learned? What, for them, is writing? How do they go about it once the door has been opened for them and they have been allowed to speak?

   The inner view: what do those who have been unable to write say once they themselves have succeeded in writing? And how do they go about it?

   To be continued - for researchers who take up the challenge.

2. For CLAP, in particular, and for other agencies sensitive to this initiative: is it possible to consider creating a place for publishing and distributing the material written by these people? Making written expression satisfying can also lead us to ask how to go about publishing the texts and disseminating them at a national or regional level. We are on the fringe, it is true, but we have to determine how to make use of normal publishing and distribution channels, on the fringes, obviously, because they are perhaps not always sensitive to this type of activity.

3. For writers (educators and learners): would it be possible one day to have in writing pages of history as told by those who lived it? We know the official history of immigration and racism, and we are familiar with a variety of analyses and interpretations. How can we make it possible for those who have

lived through history, and who continue to live it today, to write about the past and about history in the making?

Allowing those who are Excluded into the Royal Palace of Writing

THE ELOQUENCE OF THE BEDOUIN

At the Court of Baghdad, where, throughout the great Abbasid period, there reigned the highest expression of the majesty and power of cultural refinement and elegance in seigneurial clothing, one day a true Bedouin appeared, who had succeeded, after a considerable struggle, in convincing the guards that he should be allowed to read the King an enchanted poem.

Moreover, we know that it was not unusual for Moslem sovereigns from time to time to have genuine contact with their subjects.

This son of the desert, skin tanned, gaze fiery, exulting in a sacred fervour and bursting forth in a flood of disorganized and grandiloquent gesticulation, began to declaim a poem in which he successively compared the King to the most courageous of goats, the most ardent of rams, to a serpent which, in its meanderings and slitherings was agile and capable of blinding its adversaries with a single sting from its tail, and even to the sober and swift camel, the very epitome of endurance!

This poor presumptuous buffoon was met with a general outcry.

The courtesans drew their veils over their faces. Outraged by so much insolence and vulgarity, they demanded the supreme penalty for this agitator who had insulted the royal person.
Only the King, silent, listened attentively.

Finally, he handed down his sentence:
"Take this Bedouin, wash him, clothe him in the choicest garments, prepare a room for him in the palace and give him the freedom of the court for six months.

He has never known anything but a world of goats, rams, camels, serpents and asses. His speech therefore cannot draw upon anything else. But I heard his music: his speech is beautiful.

Let us give this son of the desert another world, and in six months we shall judge him."

The royal order was carried out and gave birth to one of the crowning glories of Arab poetry.[11]

Notes

1. The following comments were used as a basis for a presentation at the symposium organized by CLAP in Paris, 26-27 November 1990, entitled "non-writers and new integration dynamics".

2. *Alpha et promotion hebdo - la lettre du CLAP* 78, 6 April 1990, Guide d'action.

3. Supplement to *Alpha et promotion*: Le journal du Concours d'écriture, 12 issues May 1990-May 1991.

4. Cf. the many letters published in *Alpha et promotion*, *CLAP Info Rhône-Alpes* and the *Journal du concours d'écriture* (the competition journal).

5. Cf. Revuz, Christine. 1990. Moi, écrire? *Education permanente* 102, April.

6. Quoted from memory from Bakhtin.

7. Quote from a lecture by Philippe Meirieu.

8. See Note 5.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Maisonneuves, G.P. et Larose. [1979] *Traditions algériennes*. Republished in *Alpha et promotion hebdo - La lettre du CLAP* 19, 21 September 1990.

WORKING WITH ILLITERATE YOUNG PEOPLE IN A COMMUNITY GROUP: THE BOITE A LETTRES EXPERIENCE (1983-1987)

Sylvie Roy
Longueil, Montreal, Canada

My experience with the Boîte à Lettres in Longueuil extends from the birth of the organization in May 1983 (at that time, there were four of us, all graduates in remedial instruction from the University of Quebec in Montreal) until my departure in June 1987. Four years full of discoveries, accomplishments, fulfillment and doubts. Four of the best years of my life. The Boîte à Lettres still exists, but I will not say much about its current activities, as it is now being run and coordinated by a different team.

This document expounds the following observations:

- Teaching literacy skills to young adults is an extremely difficult task. Young people come to us after six, seven or even ten years of failure at school that has left them with a feeling of helplessness. They are then forced to come to the realization that responsibility for this failure cannot be assigned only to schools. In spite of all our teaching strategies and efforts, literacy training is still a painful and largely unsuccessful experience. Very few young people left the Boîte à Lettres knowing how to read and write adequately. The fact that there is so little improvement is just as discouraging for the young people as it is for us. Being in an extra-curricular setting, establishing small groups and linking reading to needs, are not enough for integrating reading and writing into the lives of illiterate young people. Our ambition of passing on "culture" does not work for everybody. Much patience and experimentation with new approaches and strategies are needed, in order to succeed in teaching young people, who have already been to school, to read and to write.

- Young people are not easy to recruit, and readily abandon the process of literacy training. For every young person who learns

to read and to write, there are maybe seven or more who do not. It is not only a matter of shyness or of shame, but also of the *desire* to acquire this knowledge. There are many illiterates who function in society without feeling the need to learn to read. Radio, television and the oral transmission of knowledge help, in spite of everything, to integrate illiterates into society. However, society is organized according to written language, and thus, tends to exclude those who have not mastered its use.

- Illiterate young people often have other more urgent needs aside from learning to read. If we were able to achieve results, it was through satisfying emotional or social needs: the young people who passed through our organization became more at ease and more independent, took on responsibilities, became more confident, found employment, etc. Literacy training does not bring about such concrete or immediate results, and seems secondary in comparison to the other needs. The two most important needs for these young people remain work and their social and loving relationships (as for all of us, for that matter). It is by meeting these needs that young people will find a place in society, acknowledgement and a sense of self-worth.

Defeatist observations? I do not think so. However, it must be admitted that we are offering a skill that many do not deem essential to their lives, a skill that is pushed aside because of more pressing needs, and a skill that is passed on slowly and with great difficulty owing to certain cultural barriers. Without appropriate strategies where young people are concerned, learning to read and to write is a dead-end, a "school" assignment doomed to failure in all respects. Intervention strategies consist of ensuring that the young people come to the organization, stay, come back, acquire knowledge and the sense of group life, and carry out individual and group projects.

This document, first of all, consists of a brief portrait of the Boite à Lettres and several profiles of illiterate young people, followed by comments. I then present some advice on the ways of working with young people in a community literacy group.

The Boite à Lettres is a community group that was founded in 1983. Its mandate is to teach literacy skills to illiterate young people. The target population, initially young people between the ages of 16 and 22, was extended to people under 30 years of age.

The staff consisted of three or four group leaders who saw between 20 and 30 young people every year. The Boîte à Lettres is a member of the "Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec" (RGPAQ).

The concept of community literacy training goes well beyond the pedagogical context and underlies our entire work. Louise Miller, a RGPAQ official, defined it as follows at the international conference in Toronto, in September 1987:

> The concept of community literacy that we have adopted assumes that participants should be an integral part of their training, as well as their place of learning. There are three main aspects to community literacy training. The first is pedagogical and broadens the scope of literacy training, in the sense that it should not only amount to the acquisition of reading, writing and math skills. It also aims at developing general, practical, political, social and personal knowledge. It aims at providing individuals with the appropriate skills to be better able to control their working and living conditions. For us, this aspect can be fully achieved only through a group effort, in which the participant plays an active, and not a passive role.
>
> The second aspect is a political one. We mainly aim to reach out to people or social groups who do not have control of the means to improve their working and living conditions. Community literacy training aims at developing social and political awareness in participants, by developing the capacity for critical analysis, for choice of action and evaluation.
>
> The third aspect concerns social commitment. Our objective must always be to make the population aware of the problem of illiteracy and to fight for the rights of illiterates.

Here are three examples that illustrate how this definition is lived out on a day-to-day basis at the Boîte à Lettres.

- We organized *group projects* that go beyond the scope of the classes. The project represents something that is shared by the whole group, where everyone contributes according to their potential, and takes on responsibilities for carrying out the project. In 1985, we produced a video, in 1987, a newsletter and in 1989, a calendar. All the projects continue over time: over one year for the production of the video, distribution of the newsletter, calender sales. And soon the projects require the

participation of the young people, which gives them a feeling of self-worth and the opportunity to express what is inside them. These projects have allowed reading and writing to become useful elements of communication in the lives of young people.

- We tried to *broaden general knowledge*. Without interest and intellectual curiosity, motivation quickly disappears. When young people are not aware of their environment and get by with secondhand information, it is extremely difficult to teach them to read. We must get young people used to relying on more than oral transmission in what they learn, by giving them the desire to verify the facts and to learn for themselves in books. Through information sessions, video presentations, and discussions, we have tried to give some "substance" to learning to read. In 1984 and 1985, the Boîte à Lettres organized theme sessions that brought together all interested participants. Failure at school, vacations, recreation activities in town, drinking, sexuality and computers were among the subjects that were discussed. These greatly appreciated evenings were an opportunity to get to know the various services in the area.

- We always adapted the teaching material to the reality of young people, in order to develop texts and show them that what they have said can also be written. We also placed great importance on the *composition of individual texts*. Whether it is by way of a book project, a book of poetry or a personal diary, we encouraged the young people to write, and then we used this material for reading purposes. This material informed us of the way the young people expressed their thoughts in writing, the vocabulary used and the mistakes that are generally made. This invaluable information enabled corrections and teaching to be tailored to the actual level of writing.

- We placed great importance on *raising awareness in the neighbourhood*. We wrote about our work, published reports and analyses of our experiences. We rarely refused interviews with the media in order to make known the problem of illiterate young people.

- The Boîte à Lettres always sought ways of *getting the young people involved* in the operation of the organization. There were between two and four general meetings with the young people per year, and a committee of the young people was formed from October 1984 to May 1987. The young people were integrated into the board of directors in September 1987, and staff selection was performed with their participation.

1. The Young People

1.1 *Individual portraits*

Pierre

Pierre comes from a family of nine children; his parents have received little education. His father is a self-employed trucker and Pierre is working with him while waiting to buy his own truck. He is muscular, imposing, proud of his body and of his numerous tattoos - and of the wad of bills he keeps hidden in his socks! He began attending special education classes in grade 5. Up until this point, he was only "annoying" - behind compared to others, he was left alone to sleep in his corner. He says that he was overwhelmed by the many changes in learning methods, by the noise in open-space classes and by individual work on paper. He dropped out of school after the short training program, because he did not want to be used as cheap labour in unpaid work projects. Since that time, he has been a truck driver and a furniture remover, at times living on unemployment insurance, sometimes on welfare - and also "moonlighting".

Pierre participated in the workshops on a fairly regular basis for a period of one year, and then dropped out for good, when the organization left his neighbourhood. Even though he finally felt treated as an equal by the teachers, his impulsive behaviour brought him back to the "silliness" of his childhood.

For a while, Pierre had an illiterate girlfriend, but perhaps they were too similar for the relationship to last. Later on, at a Christmas party, he introduced us to his new girlfriend. She is older than him and has a six-year old child. She also knows how to read and to write, and has no problem expressing herself. Pierre has his physical strength and his job to offer; his girlfriend, her skills in

reading and writing, and sometimes her ability to act as interpreter, when Pierre is trying to find the right words. It is a wonderful sharing of strengths. Yet Pierre is no longer motivated to learn to read and to write, if he had ever been.

Luc

Luc was 22 years old when he came to the Boîte à Lettres, all six foot two and two hundred pounds of him, clutching a small piece of paper given to him by the vocational guidance centre: "This the school?" He did not seem too convinced from looking at the room! His wife had just given birth and he wanted to learn to read so as to help his child later on. He was a resourceful and hard-working young man, very aware of his responsibilities as a father.

Luc had been in special education classes since grade 4 and was left alone until grade 9. "I drank, I went out, I smoked; they let me get on with it". He knew the alphabet and recognized a few syllables, but was able to copy sentences perfectly that he did not understand. We were quite amazed at the schoolboy diligence he displayed when writing out the mural alphabet for us! Generally speaking, he behaved like the "brat" of his childhood days in the workshops. He did not do it maliciously, for it was the only way he knew. He stayed for three weeks.

We bumped into him a few years later - when taking a taxi. He had obtained his licence, the car was new and he was very proud of it. His wife was expecting her second child. He had no problem driving us to our destination, even though he did not know how to read. He was making a good living for himself, seemed happy, and the problem of illiteracy did not seem too heavy a burden. In fact, we did not dare to ask him.

Jean

Jean is one of the pillars of the Boîte à Lettres. He has been there since 1984 and hopes to be there for a long time to come. He comes to all the activities and all the workshops. He is the right-hand man for doing all the necessary odd jobs around the place.

Jean lives with his parents and pays them rent. He is a very friendly young man, is not shy, and wears clothes that are sometimes loud and out-of-date. He speaks quickly, mumbles and sometimes has to be asked to repeat what he has just said to be understood.

He has been looking for a job for quite a while, but his experience is limited to workplace training programs offered by the social assistance office. How enthusiastically he would talk about the job promises that his bosses had made him! We tried to make him more realistic, but to no avail. He came back to us depressed and unemployed after a few weeks. Eventually, he found employment through one of the young people at the Boîte à Lettres, but he left after six months. We wondered whether he would prefer to do odd jobs rather than apply himself to a nine-to-five schedule, at a minimum wage.

As far as we were concerned, Jean made little progress in reading and writing, although he himself claimed to be very satisfied. Yet, he still does not understand everything he reads, and writes with no regard for spelling; he is able to do three-digit multiplication, but gets lost when confronted with practical problems. For a period of one year, he worked on a project that was very dear to him: he wrote a book recounting all the years of his school life. Even though he only had a few pages, for Jean, it was a book: "I've succeeded in organizing my memories and I realized that I am not so stupid, it has made me think". He sells copies of his book, which we illustrated and photocopied, and he even visited a publisher to get it published. We do not know whether he should be brought back to reality or should be left to be pleased about himself, perhaps for the first time in his life.

For Jean, the Boîte à Lettres is a home environment. He remembers the exact date of his arrival, which dress I was wearing that day, and especially the time when Pierre listened to him when he was considering committing suicide. His memory, although surprisingly accurate in remembering emotional events, does not have the same capacity for learning to read.

Alain

Alain came to the Boîte à Lettres for two years, after which he remained periodically in contact with us. He had already taken literacy courses for two years in adult education. He was a complete illiterate, and still is and will probably remain so, even though he is intelligent, resourceful and motivated.

He was placed in a special education class starting in grade 2, the year his parents got divorced. At 16, he finished the short technical program in cabinet-making, and then participated in a few

workplace training programs. He has always continued to take courses to overcome his illiteracy, which is unexplainable. He has been to see a doctor, undergone a battery of brain tests, has consulted a psychologist, all to no avail. Words always become mixed up in his head, he confuses sounds and inverts letters and syllables, in reading as well as in writing.

When he first came to the Boîte à Lettres at 23 years of age, Alain was a shy young man with a limited and repetitive vocabulary. He always repeated the last sentence that was said to him, without adding anything else of his own. He had a job, lived alone in an apartment and dressed with care. He did everything to be and to feel "normal". Since then, Alain has overcome his shyness, he laughs, has an easier time speaking and shows his emotions. The other young people have always shown him respect; he was in charge of an important part of the finances for the video project, which helped him to believe in himself.

Yet, his progress in literacy is almost nil, and it is extremely difficult to know why. Is it perhaps an emotional or neurological problem? He always says that the problem is fatigue or his glasses. He always carries a book, and says that he knows how to read. Where reading is concerned, as with other know-how, Alain seems incapable of admitting his disabilities. It is beyond him. He stopped coming to the classes for a while. He now has a girlfriend and too much work. It still does not stop him from appearing a little unhappy and from dragging around what he regards to be the problem of his life like a ball and chain.

Gilles

Gilles was 20 years old when he came to the Boîte à Lettres and remained with us for about a year and a half. He comes from a family of educated and well-off parents. His only brother is in a school adjustment class. Gilles is a good-looking young man who dresses in the latest fashions, drives a sports car, has no problem expressing himself and does so in a structured manner. He was considered dyslexic starting in grade 2 and has gone through a complicated and diversified process of school adjustment, which he talks about with cynicism and mockery.

His illiteracy did not stop him from taking a theatre course in college, because his mother did his papers for him. He works in a hospital as a ward master, and is thus the only unionized "young

person" that we know. He left the Boîte à Lettres when he moved to Montreal with his girlfriend, who studies at university. Gilles made little improvement, but he reads faster and understands more. Illiteracy does not seem to get in the way of what he wants to do, for that matter. One can speculate whether the fact that Gilles comes from a well-off environment is enough to give him all he needs to succeed, in spite of being illiterate. And whether self-confidence, intellectual curiosity and richness of vocabulary, characteristics often associated with well-off backgrounds, are more important assets for success than literacy training.

Lucie

Lucie was 18 years old when she came to the Boîte à Lettres, directly after the end of her special education schooling and workplace training. She is a shy and sullen young lady. She is considered slightly mentally handicapped and lives with her family, who are not much help to her. She is always well dressed and her hair nicely arranged, but she is bored all day long. She is not on welfare, because her father says he is capable of supporting her. Her activities consist of wandering around shopping centres, sometimes baby-sitting and regularly attending the Boîte à Lettres. In spite of her regular attendance, she has made little improvement. One has the impression that she is playing "school", that she does not know what to do with her time and that her parents are getting rid of her, somehow, by entrusting her to us. After three years, we directed her towards recreation and job hunting activities, because there was no prospect of her learning anything and because we could not meet her needs of social integration.

Lucie experienced her withdrawal from the organization as a painful rejection; she has never really understood this decision. Our main mistake was not to have contacted her parents, in order to get them involved in a process of making their daughter a responsible person. On the pretext that Lucie was an adult, we let things go.

Lucie comes to see us once in a while and is always at the same stage: at 23 years old, she is still unemployed, still spends her time in shopping centres and is continuing her studies, this time in adult education. She still does not have any money, a job, or an activity to motivate her life as an adult.

Marcel

Marcel is an example of someone completely opposite to Lucie. He is slightly mentally handicapped, he knows it and accepts it. He has worked periodically in a sheltered workshop since completing his schooling. He has a difficult time expressing himself, sometimes talks to himself and lacks concentration. He prints in extremely large letters, but is very proud of being able to get by in arithmetic. He stayed for two years at the Boîte à Lettres. During this time, he learned to drive a scooter, found himself a job and a girlfriend. He has come back a few times to the Boîte à Lettres with his girlfriend, who also is mentally handicapped. They live in an apartment together, prepare their own meals, work and look after their budget. Their parents are available, but generally the couple manage without them.

Marcel may not know how to read and write (perhaps he will never know), but his time at the Boîte à Lettres has greatly helped him, by introducing him to young people who were not mentally handicapped and who have encouraged him to become independent and to communicate. The most important factor for Marcel remains the help and support of his parents. His mother has always maintained contact with us, and she has helped Marcel look for suitable employment, which could allow him to be independent.

The difference in the case of Lucy and of Marcel is perhaps between an indifferent environment and a motivating one, the difference between the future of a mentally handicapped young man and that of a mentally handicapped young woman.

Richard

Richard is a lively and resourceful 18 year-old. He is the youngest in a family of eight children. He went through elementary school in regular classes with some problems, and was placed in special education classes at the start of high school. He dropped out of school in grade 9. Since then, he has been doing odd jobs for members of his family. He now wants to finish high school and learn a trade. His motivation seems good and his achievement is relatively high; he understands what he reads and he writes phonetically. During the first class, he fitted in very well, he talked a lot and helped those who were having the most difficulty. It was stimulating. However, he never came back after the first class. I called his home two weeks later; his mother finally admitted to me

that he had had the impression of being with "backwards" as in high school, and that he could not stand it. I was furious to think that Richard had dropped out, while he had a chance to succeed, because the atmosphere of the Boîte à Lettres reminded him too much of special education classes.

Ginette

Ginette is a regular of the Boîte à Lettres; she has been coming and going for three years. She is 23 years old and has two children. She is a plump, lively young woman who has been living with her boyfriend for quite some time. Her mother is illiterate and is taking adult education classes; it is through her that Ginette heard about the Boîte à Lettres. Ginette has a speech impediment, which was the reason why she was placed in special education classes starting in grade 1. Her five-year old child is showing signs of language problems, but that does not seem to be a problem for her and for her family. Moreover, she is very touchy in her role as mother, especially when given advice from single people.

Ginette participated in workplace training programs (with the Jeunes récupérateurs, in Longueuil) and found employment in a Montreal clothing factory. She earns $150 per week, for 40 hours of work on her feet, barely a few dollars more than her social assistance benefits. She still has great difficulty reading and writing, but she is more self-confident and more socially integrated. Her relationship is holding together, her boyfriend works, and she has a supportive environment. Perhaps she will now be better able to help her child at school, if he is ever placed in "maturity classes". Let us hope that we will continue to be of support to her. If not, it will be still another example of illiteracy repeating itself from generation to generation.

1.2 *General comments*

The influence of environment of yesterday and today

Illiteracy, far from being an individual problem, is a problem of society, of poverty and of under-education. It is a phenomenon which has the tendency of being passed on from generation to generation, and which became apparent following the institution of mandatory schooling. Before 1948, lower-income groups did not have access to education. Illiteracy was a common and normal

occurrence. Now that knowledge is accessible, and even mandatory for all, it is disturbing to see that, in spite of the efforts of educational democratization, undertaken since the end of the sixties, lower-income groups "pass" through schools without acquiring the rudiments required in adult life, in an educated and industrialized society.

Parents of illiterate young people have often not received much education themselves. They cannot help their children, because they are quickly overtaken by new teaching methods and by all the requirements of schools. The value they assign to school is theoretical, because they have managed to get along in life without having to attend. Children cannot learn the joy or appreciation of reading, if there are not any books at home and if their parents never read or write. Young people are aware of this indifference and are more influenced by the behavior of their parents, rather than by the wonderful principles expressed by them.

André is a good example of indifference towards education; he was the youngest of a family of ten children and his parents never wanted to send him to school, so as to protect him from drugs and violence. André was completely illiterate at 21 years old.

Disadvantaged families tend, even today, to have a lot of children; it is not uncommon to see families of seven, eight or nine children. The number of children can influence the quantity and the quality of attention that each child receives. When one considers the importance of the role of parents during the first years of elementary school, it is a determining factor of success. It is therefore not uncommon to see several children of the same family all experiencing difficulties at school. The size of lower-income families can also bring about instability: they move frequently because of rent increases or because the parents change jobs. Some children may be temporarily placed in a foster home, following a work-related accident, a depression or divorce. These changes have negative effects on scholastic achievement and learning difficulties often begin from the time of these disruptions. As an example, let us take Stéphane, who was placed in a foster family for two years after his father's work-related accident. His father was in a coma for a year, and Stéphane naively wonders whether it has affected his achievement in school. Stéphane never stayed more than a year in the same elementary school!

If the social environment is sometimes a factor in failure at school, it is also a factor of illiteracy among young people. The environment of a 20 year-old has not really changed from the one in which he grew up at six years of age. Literacy training has to begin with this realization.

Scholastic progress

Illiterate young people are not drop-outs in the usual sense of the term. Drop-outs are young people who leave school before the end of high school, where they were in regular classes, and who can resume their studies at the point where they were abandoned, in schools that have been recently put at their disposal (what are referred to as "drop-out schools").

Illiterate young people do not come from regular classes. They have spent the majority of their schooling in special education. They may have completed their schooling, but without having necessarily achieved a satisfactory result, whether it is basic knowledge in French or mathematics, or learning a trade. Their scholastic achievements can be summed up as follows: special education classes starting in the first years of elementary school until grade 7, then the choice of doing the short vocational program, which offers the basics of a trade, which is sometimes completely outdated (weaving, for young women), or of doing one or two years of unpaid workplace training. This schooling is final and does not lead to a diploma. The young person who abandons the short vocational program at 13 years of age is no worse off than those who stay until they are 17 or 18 years old.

The only way out for a young person who wants to continue his education is to retake literacy training in elementary school, and to repeat, step by step, everything that he has just finished failing. What a great prospect!

"Learning" disabilities

It is difficult to determine the causes and consequences of the current disabilities of illiterate young people. Is it because special education classes are so unruly that they have such little concentration? Is it because they were distracted and temperamental that they were placed in special education classes? It is not easy to determine. What is clear is that these children come, for the most part, from undereducated, lower-income backgrounds and that the

problems they were experiencing, perhaps at six years old, have not only not gone away, but have been maintained or amplified.

Young people experience numerous problems. Illiterate young people have a terrible fear of failure, which they have known throughout all their schooling. They consider themselves incompetent and stupid. The principal's office, other children and teachers, have all given them a negative image of themselves. Some have openly identified with it, others have contested it and have hidden themselves in a cloak of toughness or delinquency.

In general, only the minimum has been required of illiterate young people, and they have therefore not acquired work habits and self-discipline. They have constantly been in classes for the "mentally retarded", "poor mixers" and the "socially maladjusted", pupils having "severe or minor learning disabilities", etc. Even though they are not sure who they are, they do, however, consider themselves to be very "abnormal". Their education has been linear and dismal. Nothing really changed in the programs over the years. There was no logical progression towards grade 6 and the completion of elementary school. They also lost the fragile notion of time, and this has restricted their psychological development, as well as the establishment of long-term goals. They did not have the rightful ambitions of children regarding their future, nor goals in terms of improving their scholastic achievement, nor did they experience the sense of accomplishment of finally being the most senior pupils in their school and the most responsible.

They did not acquire the elementary curriculum, whether it be in French, mathematics, social sciences, natural sciences or geography. They did not acquire the idea of measurements; they have a difficulty estimating distances, weights and lengths. For them, everything takes on exaggerated and unreal proportions: they lost 30 pounds in one week, they have been working for two years (when it has been really only six months), they arrive an hour early for a meeting "so as not to be late".

In fact, they have often not achieved the ability of abstraction that is needed in developing concepts. The information they receive from the outside is not very structured: they have difficulty distinguishing the essential from the secondary, linking ideas, deducing and summarizing meaning. They have difficulty concentrating, memorizing and using logic in problem solving. They have difficulty with concepts that are unrelated to their immediate

reality; they have difficulty generalizing from a hypothetical example.

Furthermore, they are very passive where learning is concerned. They want to learn to read, but without doing any work, waiting for the work of the teacher to take "its effect". The majority of them never had stimulating projects at school. They only learnt how to do nothing, to fill out pieces of paper and mindlessly to copy without end. In general, they did not learn how to establish objectives, to build a project and discover the ways of carrying it out. Never having been taken seriously, they often did not have any responsibilities to meet and no sense of worth in the assignments they did. For these young people, school was only a bad experience to get through. And for those who were lucky enough to have motivating and dynamic teachers, an atmosphere of happiness and personal development prevailed, to the detriment of a rigorous learning of French and mathematics. Moreover, this also threatens our efforts in literacy training, for it is much easier to observe improvement in social areas than in the area of cognition.

Faced with almost continuous failure, illiterate young people have created ways of camouflaging their problems; they have learnt to imitate and simulate. They have learned to find self-esteem with their peers by being the "worst", the most disruptive and the least good. Those who claimed to be succeeding were pushed aside and scorned. Once they had left school, this attitude of escape continued. They learned to rely on the people around them to offset their disabilities in reading and writing, and this attitude of dependence and of avoidance is so deep-rooted that it becomes a handicap when they now want to learn.

Intolerance and rejection

At a Halloween party, several young people were talking in the kitchen of the Boîte à Lettres, over beers and with music booming in the background. The topic of discussion was the atmosphere of the place. The participants who had been there the longest, who had collaborated on the video, were doing all the talking. Their feeling was that the Boîte à Lettres had changed, that the most interesting people had left because it was a waste of time, that nothing was being learned and that there were too many "morons". Everyone was listening carefully, even those described as being "backward". I was present in the discussion, without knowing how

to intervene. The judgements of young people can be so random! Some young people who are judged to be normal clearly have an intellectual handicap, whereas others are isolated simply because they are different in the way they look or the clothes they wear. The evaluation criteria of young people are very personal and depend very much on their past experiences in school. Those who are the most critical are not necessarily the most motivated to take on literacy training.

Young people scornfully reject the environment in which they went to school, even though they are still participating in the "silliness" they are denouncing. The world of special education classes is their obsessive fear and at the same time their security; they know nothing else. They prefer, without really choosing, to be the best among "problem" people than to risk being the worst among "normal" ones. Anybody who appears to be the least bit abnormal reminds them of their past. They do not have the confidence to break away from it and to define their own personality. They are very intolerant, which is apparent in their jokes, rejections and frequent departures from the organization owing to the presence of "the backward".

As group leaders, we are caught between two fires: encouraging understanding and respect, while at the same time accepting the aggressiveness of young people, who must regain confidence in themselves. They are so afraid of being deficient that it is difficult to ask them to be tolerant towards deficiency. In the same way, it is difficult to make them aware of their "silly" behaviour, as they have never gained self-confidence through learning accomplishments, and have known nothing else.

Communication

Many illiterate young people have difficulty expressing themselves. They repeat themselves, talk by way of onomatopoeia, gestures and without using the correct words. Group conversation is a challenge, with everyone talking without listening to the others. The group leader becomes the hub of eight monologues, which is demanding and unprofitable. Learning to talk and to listen is a long process, which will develop hand in hand with a better awareness of self and others.

The high point of non-communication came about when a group of Belgian illiterates were visiting us. It was a proper Tower of

Babel, and we were all speaking French! The vocabulary and expressions of the young people, both Belgians and Quebecois, were too limited for them to understand one another. The group leaders became interpreters in the discussion of our identical reality, the common feelings and similar failures at school. We realized that, because of literature and knowledge, we had access to an international language that goes beyond the scope of time and regionalism. Conversely, illiterate young people use language in a limited and local way. Their communication is orally based, from popular television and radio programs and no phrases or vocabulary of written language are used. The French spoken by Bernard Derome (a television news announcer) is like Chinese for the young people, as is the French of France or the Belgian French Community.

Luckily, the evening spent with the Belgians was a success. The young people felt the points they had in common more than they verbalized them. We laughed a lot about these linguistic barriers, and it was while doing the washing-up after the meal that we finally came together.

Love relationships

Many couples came together, thanks to the Boîte à Lettres. We saw several attempts as well as the successful creation of a few stable relationships. Many young people feel painfully alone and their main goal is to find a partner. We have found that this can become a good motivator in terms of attendance at the workshops. As it is often their first serious relationship, there are problems of insecurity, jealousy and exclusivity. I had a tricky time with a couple that had come together in my workshop, because the young woman saw me as a threat each time I spoke to the young man in question.

The context of the Boîte à Lettres facilitates interaction and makes it more secure, because the young people do not have to try to meet anyone. We sometimes reluctantly became intermediaries: the young people, incapable of talking directly to the interested person, would come to us to explain their desires and frustrations. We had to pass the message on.

The young people who succeeded in establishing a stable relationship quickly left the organization. One can imagine that they wanted to forget the context of their meeting as soon as possible, because it reminded them of a common past failure. Therefore, they

left without having achieved their educational objective. Their main motivation became the material organization of their relationship: a shared apartment, money to be put aside, future plans, the hope of marriage. Learning to read disappeared with their other good intentions, until the pressing need comes back again. We are a long way from offering an essential and vital service, and we realize this each time there is any question of love or a new job.

The situation of young women

As there were generally fewer of them in special education classes in elementary school, there are not very many 20 year-old young women taking literacy training. Owing to their upbringing, young women are often more docile, and conform more readily to the discipline of schools, which gives them a better chance of passing elementary school classes. Young women fall behind in high school instead, especially in science and mathematics. Young women of today still make for traditional jobs, which are less fulfilling and less well-paid than those of young men. This is also true, if not more so, for young women in special education. In grade 8, in the short vocational program, the choices for young women are generally limited to weaving, cooking and sewing. One might as well say that they learn only daily domestic tasks and not the basics of a trade. Although there is not much variety, the choice for young men is somewhat more interesting: cabinet-making, automobile body work and repairs, bookbinding and mechanics.

Regarding workplace training programs, they offer young women a continuation of their position as women and as mothers: looking after children in a daycare centre or working in a cafeteria or in clothing production. Their access to the job market is very limited.

Illiterate young women, being generally responsible for children, are more dependent than young men. They want to have children because it is a sign of social success. They can finally "make something that is beautiful", and do it as well as any young woman who has been to school. While maternity represents a new motivation for learning, it can also bring about greater isolation or impoverishment. If a separation occurs, the young woman finds herself alone with the financial burden of a child. Day-care being expensive, it is difficult for these mothers to contemplate going back to school or work, which requires great amounts of energy and motivation, especially when one is illiterate.

Illiterate young women who have a literate partner often live in a double dependency: financial dependence and that of not knowing how to read. This leaves them unsure of themselves and confines them in a traditional role. They must rely on their partner's money and ability to read. It is difficult for them to conceive of separation, for they have few resources of their own.

In the case of an illiterate young man with a literate young woman as a partner, it is often a much more balanced relationship: mutual dependence establishes equality. The illiterate partner provides his strength of being able to work and financial security, but he needs the abilities of his partner, in order to be able to read and pay bills and to fill out forms. The woman has more respect, because she contributes to the relationship by way of her abilities. The male, who has a job, is nonetheless better viewed socially, work being more valued than the ability to read. We have known several illiterate young men living in this situation of interdependence. In general, it resulted in fairly egalitarian and more stable relationships.

Particular importance has to be given to young women in our recruitment, in order to help them overcome their lack of confidence, to encourage them to go as far as they can with their abilities, to help them, in real terms, to find babysitters for their children, to get out of the house and to find a job.

Expectations regarding literacy training

Young people come to the Boîte à Lettres for very specific reasons: the insistence of a new partner, spare time between jobs, the prompting of a social assistance officer, the birth of a child, etc. They want to read and to write, but they especially want to be independent (in relation to their parents, their family), to have "a job, a boyfriend or a girlfriend". The need to read and to write is associated with being normal; it is vague and imprecise. They want to be dubbed "normal", as if they were wearing a label, but at the same time they have always been capable of managing without knowing how to read and to write. They thus have a difficult time knowing how to integrate this new knowledge into their lives.

Young people want to learn to read above all for practical reasons, such as being able to read the newspaper on the bus in the morning, to read letters they have received and to fill out forms by themselves. Some even want to acquire a school-leaving certificate, but there are not many of these. Reading is a tough necessity that

has nothing to do with pleasure, relaxing and the need for knowledge. They do not live in an environment where books and magazines are very common, and their intellectual curiosity is affected by this.

When they come to the Boîte à Lettres, the young people are also looking for a place of social interaction, a place where they will be treated equally and respected as adults. If they are looking for someone to talk to, they particularly want to be taken seriously. For the most part, these expectations have been largely met: the Boîte à Lettres has become a reference point, a stable and friendly place for socializing. The very fact that we existed, that we represented a different type of school and a different image of teachers seemed sometimes enough. The young people derive self-confidence and trust from the Boîte à Lettres, even if they only come once in a while.

We can sum up the expectations formulated by the young people as follows: to learn to read and to write, to have a job, to find a partner and to have friends. Paradoxically, our role is to meet the first need, but it is in relation to the other expectations that we obtain the best results, particularly in respect of improving one's way of life. Reading and writing remain the most ambiguous objective and the most difficult to attain.

2. **The Community Group for Literacy**

2.1 *Making known the organization*

Raising awareness

Raising awareness consists in making known the problems of illiteracy among the people in the area. This could include the general population, the leaders of community groups and those in charge of public organizations and teachers in elementary or high schools. The facts of illiteracy have to be made known, its symptoms and causes explained and the possible remedies widely circulated, however modest they might be. An action of social importance must be reflected in an articulate way, in order to reach a wide public.

For the Boîte à Lettres, this objective has been a constant worry. We have published two research reports that we have circulated on

every possible occasion. We have produced a video that we have shown to various audiences. We have created a newsletter from texts written by the young people. We have rarely refused interviews. All this has enabled us to become legitimate spokespersons. This is also apparent by the various invitations we have received, one of which was to represent Canada at UNESCO, in 1986, at a conference on illiterate young people.

Raising awareness in the area is one of the main responsibilities of community organizations. From my experiences of raising awareness, three thoughts stand out:

* The promotion of awareness must not replace action.

  At a certain point, we had the impression at the Boîte à Lettres that our best work was in raising awareness, and not the work we were doing with young people. In two years of existence, we had not stopped talking about our work. Yet, everything we do is based on our work with young people. It can be dangerous to become experts in a subject: one can gradually lose contact with reality, which is itself constantly evolving. It should be mentioned that the fact that we were the only ones who were specialized in the field of literacy training for young adults pushed us to the forefront of the scene and demanded our constant presence.

* There are certain dangers for the young people who are involved with the task of raising awareness.

  At the Boîte à Lettres, we have always sought the involvement of the young people in this task, because it is a question of their reality. Their quotes were the basis of the first study, their personal accounts were at the heart of the video, and several media interviews were carried out with their collaboration. However, it is disturbing to realize that these young people, who previously were of interest to no one, became the objects of much fascination because they were illiterate! The press is eager for copy of this kind which it can denounce. Journalists look for the worst cases, denouncing the school system, or rouse the public with success stories of people who have overcome their illiteracy.

In spite of ourselves, we were involved with this sudden infatuation, without always considering the consequences. In the face of all this interest, the young people reacted by ending up saying what was expected of them. We were astonished to hear them say that they had never learned anything at school and that, since they had been at the Boîte à Lettres, their lives had radically changed. This was far from being the case! The young people were becoming naive victims of the media. For these young people, who have difficulty estimating time, this sudden review of their lives was not particularly beneficial. I remember very well Alain's indignation while looking at his photograph spread out across a full page of *La Presse* newspaper, under biased quotes from what he had said in confidence.

One must therefore be very careful regarding the role played by the young people in raising awareness, to ensure that the young people themselves get something worthwhile and positive out of it. They are not zoo animals to be put on display to satisfy the curiosity of scandal-mongers.

* <u>The promotion of awareness must especially not be confused with recruitment.</u>

Raising awareness may have a certain effect on recruitment, but this effect is uncertain and indirect. Recruitment is a different task altogether, much more concrete and demanding, which calls on the skills of the group leader and not the explanations and speculations of the intellectual.

Recruitment

Recruitment is an essential task in the operation of a service such as ours. Our challenge is considerable, for illiterates are not easy to reach. On one hand, many of them do not see illiteracy as the problem that society considers it to be. On the other hand, illiterates generally do not call on public or community services. They manage to get by themselves as best as they can, relying especially on the help of those in their immediate surroundings. Those who want to learn to read often live with their illiteracy as a defect that has to be concealed.

Young people live in situations that make recruitment even more difficult. They have just recently left school and feel like doing

something else: find a job, get by or "live their life". For the time being, they write off "school" learning and try to succeed in other areas. We offer an essential service, but one that is difficult to "sell", especially to those concerned. Our job consists of informing young people that there are services available to them and that they can use them, when they feel they are ready. The fewer the intermediaries between the young people and ourselves, the better the recruitment.

The most common methods of recruitment include articles in regional newspapers, simple and appealing flyers and visits to community and public organizations to leave posters, flyers and to meet with those in charge. We used these methods for a long time, but they did not bring about as many results as anticipated. After four years, the Boîte à Lettres has become known as a reliable and serious service. However, the number of participants has not greatly increased, maintaining itself between 20 and 25 young people for the Longueuil area and surroundings.

Why has recruitment stagnated? It is easy to feel guilty and to imagine that the young people are not satisfied with what we are offering them. Yet, we are not responsible for the fact that literacy training is not an essential need on the same level as finding food, clothing and shelter. We are not responsible for the fact that literacy training is a long and demanding process that confronts people with their past failures, and whose results are far from being guaranteed. But it seems to me that our recruitment efforts were performed in a timid and limited way.

Through our actions, we can have an influence in the areas where illiteracy is likely to be found. We have to be animators outside of the Boîte à Lettres, before the process of literacy training begins. And this is what is the most demanding. The task is not easy to plan, it must be done as we go, using every favourable opportunity.

Recruitment is a crucial task that involves continuity, objectives, an action plan and the designation of those responsible. This task is similar to that of a "street" worker: it means GETTING OUT of the building, going to hand out leaflets and talking with people in the subway, at entrances to banks on every first of the month, when social assistance payments are sent out, in shopping centres, in youth centres. On these occasions, one often sees the same people, one learns to understand daily problems, and little by little, people get to know who you are. One learns where the young people spend

their time and discovers the resource people and leaders in the area. This "street" work can provide us with much information on illiterate young people, drop-outs and the unemployed. It can help us to know what their concerns and reservations are with respect to literacy.

Reception of the young person into the organization consolidates the initial work of recruitment. It is important that this work be done continuously and not only in September and January. The turnover being quite high, the young people concerned must be able to benefit from the service as soon as there is an available space. The effectiveness of the reception and the positive impression of the first interview are elements that will determine whether the young person will continue the process. For each person who agrees to take courses, there are at least five people interviewed who do not.

Waiting lists are, wherever possible, to be avoided. The first interview must happen quickly, even if there are no available places. This meeting enables us to see whether the organization corresponds to the needs of the person, or whether they should be directed elsewhere. The interview is a further introduction for the illiterate person, an opportunity to become acquainted with the place and the people who come to the organization.

At the Boîte à Lettres, the initial interviews lasted one to two and a half hours. We took whatever time was needed, for the interview is very revealing. There was no one in charge of the interviewing, everyone took part in it in turn. This enabled us to be in continuous contact with the young people, instead of being confined to running workshops.

The interviews were conducted only with the young person: the people that accompanied them had coffee with another group leader in the kitchen. The interview was conducted from a series of questions on scholastic achievement, family situation, work experiences, and the young person's own explanation of his or her learning disabilities and objectives. We used a test consisting of three different levels of difficulty in French and mathematics. We also asked questions on general knowledge and geography. During the interview, we avoided taking notes so as not to intimidate the young person. The transcript of the information obtained will be very useful for painting a true picture of the young people who have been to see us and for improving our work with them.

At the latest, we try to give an answer three or four days after the interview. If there is no space available, we try to call the young person often to invite them to a party, an evening information session, in short, to remind them that we care about them and that we want them to continue the initiative.

2.2 *The team*

Two conditions are essential to belonging to a community group for literacy: experience or training in teaching, in elementary school if possible, and experience or ability in leading a group. It is not easy to be a teacher and a group leader at the same time. We have constantly wavered back and forth between these two poles. Sometimes we let the teaching go, to spend time only on suppers, meetings and activities with the young people. We were delighted with the group spirit and the crowd who came to the Boîte à Lettres, but the progress made in French was not substantial. We shut ourselves up in our offices to prepare exceptional material, but we no longer had the time to talk to the young people! In this case, as in others, a balance must be found and constantly revaluated.

"Good" teachers

The Boîte à Lettres was established by four graduates of the Bachelor of Education in school adjustment program. Although the staff has undergone many transformations since the beginning and their experiences have been diversified, I am still convinced that experience in teaching is a major asset when forming a group, because our goal is to teach reading and writing. The training in remedial instruction gave a certain distinctness to the Boîte à Lettres; we had been trained to teach young people six years younger than they were. Through our teaching practice in schools, we had experienced special education classes and saw the qualities that were required to teach them. We knew the reading methods, the school programs and the teaching material at elementary school level.

Our training enabled us to focus on elementary school and high school, to have a certain amount of access and to understand what really goes on there. The lack of ties between teachers who teach in elementary school and high school and those who work in adult education, especially in community groups, is a serious problem.

There is a wall of suspicion and ignorance separating each sector, which divides up the task of teaching and prevents an overall vision of teaching. It has very often happened that we met elementary school teachers who did not show any interest in literacy training, whereas the learning disabilities begin right in elementary and get worse from there!

We met with special education teachers at the elementary school level with the goal of getting to know their teaching methods and their material. Our training in remedial instruction made us more demanding in terms of teaching. We did not want to re-create, as is the case in some special education classes, a free atmosphere of activity and of warm contact in which learning to read comes last. We wanted to offer a program that was as structured as possible, to allow the young people gradually to evaluate themselves and to demand the best of themselves. This was the basis of our faith in their abilities.

Teaching networks

Working in literacy training is restricting and demanding. We continually need to rethink our approach, evaluate our actions, define our objectives and find appropriate material. It is not as if the wheel has to be reinvented: educational research has already been done, and the material intended for children from disadvantaged areas, the methods of training and evaluation, and the literacy learning methods, deserve to be studied carefully. It is a question of taking out what is useful and adapting it.

In 1984, teaching was only one of the many subjects discussed in our meetings, where we also discussed finances, internal management, etc. These meetings were held too frequently (one a week) and had too many items on the agenda to be effective. In 1987, we organized monthly staff meetings devoted solely to teaching. These were prepared and presented by the person in charge of the item, and gave us time to discuss a theme and to expand on it according to our practical experience. We also turned to resource people from the teaching field. We met with other literacy teams to discuss our similar practical experiences: evaluation of teaching methods, strategies to be adopted concerning mathematics, questioning of failures and development of teaching projects.

The most important thing for the staff, whatever the method being used, is to remain open-minded, freely to admit the problems

and weaknesses, to define the teaching needs and to go and find resources where they can be found.

Good group leaders

To work in a literacy group, it is not enough to just be a "good" teacher. One must consider oneself a group leader and want to take action beyond that which is pedagogical, in the very lives of the young people. Often, it is through the consistency and the quality of our action that we are able to establish a link with young people, and provide support that enables them to keep going in this very slow and difficult learning process. If this support is not provided, the young people will readily abandon the class and not come back to inform us of their problems or achievements.

The young people come to us for overall support. They do not break down their needs. If they recently went through the break-up of a relationship or left a job, they cannot be receptive to learning. Their world is susceptible to all kinds of disruptions. Young people will not remain long in courses that are difficult and that fail to contribute to their self-esteem. We must therefore take all these factors of motivation and demotivation into account. For the young people who have just spent six to ten hours on our premises, the organization is a reference point.

Being a group leader can involve many different things from the most insignificant to the most fundamental. Going to have supper at Michel's place to help him and his partner with their decision regarding the continuation of a pregnancy. Having a coffee with André, because he feels like committing suicide. Staying after class, sometimes for an hour, because the young people simply feel like talking. Helping Line who wants to leave her boyfriend and at the same time sort out her drug problem. Finding activities for Robert, who is bored. Having supper every second night with the young people who arrive an hour before the class starts. There is no end!

It is obvious that one must not take oneself for God Almighty (or Mother Theresa, depending on the case) and try to solve all the problems. We are, first and foremost, a group devoted to literacy, and the young people should clearly be aware of this. But one must be attentive, agree to listen to them and to talk, and then direct them to the appropriate services. The young people must especially not be left isolated to face their problems.

Service networks

The primary source of services is the staff itself, which represents a place of exchange and mutual help. Group leaders must not carry the weight of their actions alone; the whole team must be behind them. The consistency of the staff will in this way be felt by the young people, and will be a positive factor in maintaining a stable atmosphere. One has to know how to get organized; the team can establish a rotating schedule for availability to the young people.

Following this, other services can come from different sources; the important thing is that they must allow young people to be seen in their total situation, and not just as illiterates. The Youth Advisory Bureau (YAB) is a good service: it offers a series of workshops and conferences on the subject of young people and work, drugs, school and sexuality. The Local Community Service Centres (LCSC), which have the mandate of providing preventive health measures and of organizing community service, can also provide interesting workshops on the health of young people and sexuality. The people who work in the area of preventing school drop-outs can also shed some useful light, as can community groups that deal with housing, prostitution, etc.

I remember a meeting that was held of a few dozen community organizations that work with young people across the province of Quebec. Religious groups had called the meeting to discuss the priorities of young people. This meeting of exchange was very worthwhile and enabled us to include literacy in the overall needs of young people.

2.3 *The life environment*

First of all, the atmosphere of a supper: "happy hour" before classes begin (a memory of autumn 1986):

> Johanne quickly finishes her photocopying; she wants to have the time to go outside before the whirlwind starts. The telephone rings; it's Julie who takes ten minutes to explain that she will be arriving a little bit late. As always, André is the first to arrive at 5 o'clock. He goes to buy himself something to eat in the restaurant downstairs. At the beginning of the month, he has his meal of the day; at the end, he only has some french fries, but then he says that he is not hungry.
>
> Suddenly, a radio is heard; that must be Claude who has just arrived. Dragging his feet, he goes into the kitchen to have a coke

(sometimes he has to be asked whether he paid for it or not!). He then goes and sits down in the living area without taking off his leather jacket, even though it is boiling hot in the room. Ginette comes in and sits down in the kitchen laughing. She is more than likely taking a break from her duties as a mother by arriving early. As for me, I have to go and buy some cheese, I rush out and pass three people coming up the stairs. Soon, there are twelve of us in the tiny kitchen. Six people are sitting down, trying to eat, while the others are standing, jammed between the chairs and the cupboards. The living area is empty. Perhaps Carole has arrived; being a shy person, she must be studying in her classroom. It is becoming very loud in the kitchen; Denis is eating food from the young people's plates. Everyone quite enjoys it really, except me of course!

I have a headache; I am trying to think about my class, but two people are talking to me at the same time. I have to make them understand that I am not a tape recorder! I am also concerned about Jean-Pierre, who has not been heard from for two weeks.

There is discussion going on in the hallway, and this is blocking the way; Denis is talking to Lucien about the articles that are posted on the bulletin board. Johanne takes advantage of the crowd of people in the kitchen and a miraculous lull in the conversation to remind everybody of the agenda of the next general meeting, and invites everybody to attend.

To set an example, we grab two of the young men at random and do the dishes. Denis has already slipped away, because he has to work on the reading text for his workshop, and as it is already six-thirty. Claude has taken over the telephone, talking to his partner for the last half an hour; he most likely feels that it is quieter here than at home! I am going to have to go and talk to the new addition, he looks isolated in his corner. But Alain has gone over there, well done! Michelle is keeping an eye on the door; for two weeks, Pierre has not been calling her and her only chance of seeing him is here. I would swear that right now it is her biggest motivation for coming to the Boîte à Lettres. It is the opposite for Gérard and Manon: since they have been together, we do not see them any more.

The workshops will be starting in three more minutes. I finish my dessert, and I grab another coffee as I pass by. The young people are already settled, except for Pierre who adamantly insists that Denis go and see his "new set of wheels". Quick, it is already seven o'clock!

For the young people, taking courses is extremely demanding. The group atmosphere and the availability of the group leaders are essential motivation factors. We have to create and operate a "life

environment"; generally speaking, this begins with the careful choice of location for the classes. The Boîte à Lettres has known three different locations and I will describe them briefly, and then sum up the essential conditions that constitute a life environment.

The initial location was a small, three-room commercial suite, located on the second floor of a pizza restaurant on Chemin Chambly. In the neighbourhood there was a greengrocer's, a garage, a hotdog stand and a shopping centre. The young people lived in this neighbourhood and felt at home there. Inside the premises, the décor was awful, but we left it that way, because of lack of money and time. As one came up the outside staircase, the young people would be sitting on the steps talking and watching people pass by. The place was well liked by the young people. As there was no room for privacy, we spent our time there informally and without fear of getting anything dirty. The atmosphere was very cosy. At this time, our teaching material was very basic and of poor quality, but our availability was unlimited. We were intrigued by the young people, and the literacy training was a learning experience, full of daily surprises. We stayed there for a year and a half.

The second location was very different and so were our expectations; we wanted to have something pleasant, big and clean. We moved onto the third floor of a building in the old part of Longueuil. It had six rooms with hardwood floors. It was wonderful! We decorated it and purchased office furniture. The young people were not too fond of this place, nor of the prevailing atmosphere. Everything was too practical, too defined in terms of its use. Sometimes our office door was closed because one of us wanted to work in peace. The young people felt that they did not belong there outside of class hours, and did not know their way around Longueuil's chic neighbourhood. In addition, the inside stairwell, which led up to the third floor, gave the premises the look of an office. After two years, we moved again.

The third location, which I have not worked in, seems to be a good compromise between the two previous ones. The Boîte à Lettres resettled in the working-class neighbourhood, above a video club. In the area was a cheap restaurant, a garage, some shops and street life. The stairway is on the outside and from the large windows we can see the commercial streets below. The premises are easy to locate and easily accessible. All the rooms open up into a large kitchen.

I can recall these few thoughts on looking for a good "life environment".

* One should consider the neighbourhood when choosing premises

  Even if the rooms correspond to our needs and the place is easily accessible by public transport, it is pointless to set up shop on a back street, where there is nowhere to have coffee, to shop etc. Setting up in neighbourhoods where the young people never go is to be avoided.

* The young people prefer to have direct access to the premises from the outside

  The young people like to sit on the steps of the stairway or on the balcony; they can see people arriving. Furthermore, a door that opens direct on the exterior has the advantage of not giving the impression of entering into the waiting room of an office, where no one is supposed to make any noise and must wait their turn. The premises must look more like a house than an office.

* Find a balance between the likes of the young people and those of the group leaders

  The young people could have a room for chatting without bothering anyone, for watching television or listening to music. In practice, it is difficult to organize this area. The young people do not come there every day as we do, they do not have any shared ideas on decorations, and it is often our company that they are seeking. But it is possible to let the young people have their say in the layout, the decoration and the use of the rooms.

* Even if the premises are adequate and in a good neighbourhood, they are useless if they are not accessible outside of class hours

  The young people have to feel that they are not bothering anyone when they come to the premises, and that these also belong to them. For this, a permanent and specific schedule is needed, in order to ensure consistency. We were open Monday to Thursday, from two o'clock to ten o'clock. Friday was devoted to meetings

or to days off, and the mornings to the individual work of the group leaders.

Yet a life environment is brought about primarily by the availability and the presence of the group leaders. Exchanges should be numerous, spontaneous and not too structured (" Okay, you want to talk to me, how about next Wednesday at two thirty?"). Availability is to drop what you are doing to spend half an hour chatting with a young person. It is to accept the fact that, during the hour before classes begin, there is going to be noise, laughter, the television and the radio, and continual coming and going. Availability happens spontaneously; important meetings are often held on the edge of a table, during washing-up or over coffee. This in no way replaces the need for occasional meetings and for more structured interviews; but spontaneous availability must be the backdrop of communication with the young people.

* A suitable place for learning all forms of reading

Learning to read must go beyond the framework of the courses and slowly become part of the lives of the young people. This is why we built up a library of over a hundred new, appealing and easy-to-read books, with the collaboration of the City of Longueuil Library: comic books, books for the participant's children, fairy tales, short novels and simplified books on science, health, natural phenomena, etc. The books were placed out in the open: by introducing them into the classes and by organizing a personal loan system, an attempt was made to encourage reading. It was still not a service that was used very much, but books were part of the visual surroundings. We also purchased magazines that are likely to be of interest to the young people; we left them lying around in the workshops, in the kitchen and in the washrooms. Furthermore, a lot of signs had to be put up, in order to accustom the young people to look at written messages and to ask themselves what they mean. There was therefore a place in the washrooms for graffiti (that we ourselves conscientiously filled), bulletin boards where photos of the most recent parties were displayed, newspaper clippings, a humorous cartoon, etc. The agendas of general meetings were posted right at the entrance, in order to catch people's eye (we paid particular

attention to the visual presentations of our posters). As finishing touches, there were calendars on which the dates of parties and important events were marked, as well as all kinds of posters. The premises "displayed" their raison d'être, and the message has constantly changed, in order to retain people's interest.

Ideally, I would have preferred that the locale should be also a place for working individually and independently between workshops. The young people could have access to material prepared in advance, in the form of graduated and self-correcting work sheets, or diskettes of exercises for working on the computer. In this way, the young people would have the chance to acquire work habits by becoming more responsible, in terms of their learning objectives. We would be available, but the young people could just as well get organized by themselves. It is a project that we have often talked about, but which has yet to become a reality.

3. The Community Group in its Environment

3.1 *Knowing the environment*

Community groups are part of a movement that has its own history and characteristics so far as the population, the economy, housing and education are concerned. To be part of a movement, is to take part in discovering all aspects of it. To know a city or a neighbourhood is to discover, through reading, meeting people and strolling around, the history of the city, the crime rate, suicide rate, school drop-out rate, the recreation activities, community struggles and the movements of the population. It is not an easy task, daily work is so engrossing that this examination of the area is often forgotten.

The Boîte à Lettres is situated in Longueuil, a city on the outskirts of Montreal, which obviously does not have all the services and infrastructure of the big city. Longueuil is a "big village" that has experienced a very disorganized urban development. Side by side are gigantic shopping centres, old country cottages, office towers and modestly priced apartments. The city is not divided up into neighbourhoods as is Montreal; the parishes are still very much involved with the activities of young people and the elderly. There are two Local Community Service Centres, three Travail-Québec

centres as well as three high schools in a radius of four square kilometres. There are also two libraries, a college and a lone metro station, which is a big meeting place because it is also the last stop of all the bus routes on the South Shore.

According to the 1981 census, there are 125,000 residents, of whom 22 percent are between the ages of 15 and 25. Community groups are also well represented: almost all of the people who work in this district know each other, as either friends or acquaintances. The city provides help to these community groups, and also the possibility of using various premises and its printing services. But its priority remains organizing sports for young people. Communication between community groups, as well as with public organizations, is easier in a city like Longueuil, than in the bureaucratic sluggishness and anonymity of Montreal. Yet, in spite of my four years of work in this city, my knowledge of the area is still poor and mainly amounts to awareness of community groups and public organizations that have ties with young people.

If illiterate young people are considered an entirely separate group having many different needs, literacy training being only one of the many, knowing the area is essential for referral purposes.

Like most young people of their age, illiterate young people are concerned about finding employment; for them, it is the first basic condition of entering into the real world of adults and of attaining a certain financial independence. Young people also want to leave home, find a place to stay and establish a love relationship. As much as having a relationship, the idea of having their own place brings about a feeling of real freedom with respect to their parents. This does not mean that their plans always work out, but they remain a priority in the minds of these young people.

For some, other problems are more urgent: settling a difficult separation, getting out of drugs, finding an apartment or facing psychiatric problems. Even if they were illiterate, many only stayed for an interview and went back to their world, without our being really able to help them. At least we know that they are aware of our organization and could come back.

We must therefore see ourselves as one of the links in a chain of co-operation that unites the organizations working with young people. Mutual awareness of services and fast and direct referrals are essential.

3.2 *Community groups*

Our closest allies in meeting the needs of young people remain the other community groups. Together, we share similar objectives, have a flexible structure and common demands. It would not be incorrect to say that in the beginning, each group considers itself to be the most important. There is a danger of competing against each other for subsidies and for attracting "clients". This attitude in no way helps the work we are doing. On the contrary, open-mindedness and frankness is what should be developed, if one wants to learn from others and better understand our environment.

We can establish our community alliances according to two axes: the horizontal axis, for those who offer community literacy training, and the vertical axis for those who work with young people.

Youth networks

The organizations in Longueuil with whom we are associated are as follows: the Youth Advisory Bureau, the Youth Centre, Entretemps (short-term and middle-term accommodation), the Jeunes récupérateurs (employment program), SEMO (an employment service funded by the Canadian employment service before it disappeared in 1986) and the Young Catholic Workers (YCW). We often work with the same young people, but for different reasons.

The Boîte à Lettres was a member of a youth consultation committee in Longueuil for several years. This coalition wanted to define a series of rights for young people, to provide help to groups and to establish better coordination with respect to municipal, provincial and federal authorities. Participating in this group was a really worthwhile experience for us. We became familiar with our community, its services and its projects. We committed ourselves to defending the other groups, when there was a question of closing down services, the reduction of a subsidy or outside interference. It was together that we were able to establish a common position on the services that were needed in Longueuil, in order to meet the needs of young people, and also on the support we were expecting from the municipality and public organizations.

For our part, we explained the problem of the relatively unknown phenomenon of illiteracy to the leaders of youth groups. We shared our experiences regarding the channels of school adjustment, vocational paths that do not lead anywhere, such as the short

vocational program and workplace training programs. Through our work, youth groups are now becoming more concerned with the educational side of their objectives and defend it before the public authorities concerned.

For several years, we have had strong links with the organization, "Les Jeunes récupérateurs", which provides young people with job training and a sense of responsibility. The goal is to provide them with a positive experience of four to six months and to facilitate their introduction into the job market. Several of our young people participated in the Jeunes récupérateurs program. The young people continued to come to their literacy classes in the evenings and the businesses took this into account in their work schedules. We were frequently in contact with the group leaders in order to track progress and to discuss any difficulties. For several young people, this experience enabled them to find steady employment.

Collaboration in referrals between youth groups is not carried out in a bureaucratic way. We know the people who work in the organizations and know that the young people will be quickly and unfussily accepted by them. To preserve a harmonious link between these groups, communication must be continually maintained. One cannot rely on reputations, whether they be good or bad. One has to make the rounds, to learn about other groups and to make oneself known, for the structures change and the staff turnover is quite high. Invitations are sent out about once a year to the various organizations to come and visit the Boîte à Lettres. It is a time for discussion, for showing our working material and the video and for introducing the new staff members. This mutual awareness will help the group leaders when referring young people to an appropriate service.

The "Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec"

Since it was founded, the Boîte à Lettres has been a member of the Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec (RGPAQ). We have participated in all the meetings and have been involved in working groups as well as the coordinating committee. For us, the Regroupement is essential. It does not simply exist so we can obtain better subsidies. Literacy training is a an increasingly widespread social concern in different segments of the population. Alternate solutions urgently need to be supported in the traditional

school system. There is not only one approach to learning, and non-governmental organizations are the proof of this, through organizing training on a smaller scale, according to the needs of the different segments of society they serve.

Community education is continuously threatened with extinction or take-over. In the province of Quebec, the government spent $25 million in 1989 for literacy training. Community groups only received $2 million of this money, a budget that is frozen from year to year.

We must be a national movement to ensure the survival of community education. Through the Regroupement, we pool our ideas and analyses based on our respective experiences. We expand our vision of literacy through the groups that work with target segments in urban and rural areas. Each contributes to improving the overall picture.

Since it was founded, the RGPAQ has helped to put the question on a political and social level, in such a way as to affect public opinion, as well as that of public authorities. While we are recognized as an essential partner on a national level, as we are internationally (UNESCO and the International Council of Adult Education), the RGPAQ and its member groups receive only a small part of the available funding.

3.3 *The "non-organized" partners*

The immediate surroundings of illiterate people

Our partners in the work of literacy training are, first of all, the people who are close to the young people in question. The collaboration that we hope for must not be perceived as paternalistic interference, nor as proof that the young people cannot take care of themselves. The immediate surroundings include the parents, partners, friends, and brothers and sisters of the young persons taking literacy training. Their attitudes can have a major effect on the behaviour of young persons with regard to their learning.

Some of those closest to the young people express feelings of indifference and contempt towards those in literacy training. They never ask questions, and do not offer any real assistance in the learning. They have already adopted the opinion of the school system and have classified the young person among the "incompetents". This contempt is overwhelming for the young person and

it leaves them completely uninterested, as in "elementary school" times.

In some cases, however, those who are close to the young person are too protective; they write letters for the young person, pay the bills, read the mail and drive the young person to wherever he or she has to go. Although the intentions are commendable, this attitude furthers passivity and brings about a lack of confidence and initiative in confronting and dealing with problems. Continual help from those who are close to the young person is stifling. The illiterate person feels powerless, passive and will progressively become accustomed to this reassuring takeover of control.

Sometimes, however, those close to the young people know how to help: they accept the problem of illiteracy and follow their progress, while providing appropriate help. They constantly encourage them in what they are doing, without doing it for them. First and foremost, these people love the person as he is, and consider him to be *normal*. This is the foundation of all interaction, and we must pursue it with those who play a part in the lives of the young person. If not, the way of life of young people will remain an obstacle to literacy training.

Often, those close to the young person do not know how to start helping. They do not have a clear picture of the steps that need to be taken, and attach great importance to superfluous or inadequate learning. The community group must link the people in the young person's life to the process of literacy training, in order to get them to play a constructive role in the learning process.

This can be accomplished by inviting these people to attend a class or end-of-session evenings, where the results of the work are presented. The young people have the chance to display the projects they have worked on and to explain their learning objectives. Special meetings can be arranged on our literacy approach and on illiteracy in general, in order to assist these people in obtaining a global view of the problem.

These activities make collaboration with family members possible, which regular schools have not always succeeded in doing: getting closer to the home environment and to enabling experiences to be shared on both sides. While the organization has things to pass on, the same is true for the those in the young person's surroundings. This mutual edification will be beneficial in understanding the

mental blocks of some young people and the way that they express themselves outside of the limited area of the literacy group.

At the Boîte à Lettres, we have undertaken this activity without giving it a structured form or precise objectives. We have invited those who are close to the young people to Christmas parties and end-of-the-year parties. We have also had "open house" evenings at the beginning and end of sessions. We were scared of appearing paternalistic by involving the parents. Yet, we came to realize that the young people were happy to allow us to get to know those close to them. They were also pleased to be able to show their place of learning, to show the work they are doing, the books or the texts they are reading and the group project underway. The closer and the more constant the ties between the outsiders and insiders, the better the chances of transferring knowledge.

Resource persons in the area

Those who may be our allies are not always organized within group networks. Certain groups or individuals are essential partners because they have been working in their neighbourhood for a long time, because they are known and respected in the area and because they are aware of the needs of people. It could be a person in charge of a used clothing agency located in a church basement, a parish priest, the owner of a corner store or the manager of a credit union. These people work in isolation and often in obscurity. One must make oneself directly known to them. They have valuable experience. They have to be made aware of the work we are doing, be invited to come and visit the premises and be encouraged to refer the young people in need of literacy training that they come into contact with to us. This contact will better help to integrate the organization into a neighbourhood and enable the establishment of numerous referral networks for recruitment.

3.4 *Public organizations*

School institutions

We are in contact with three different sectors of public education: elementary schools, the literacy sector of adult education and "drop-out schools". With elementary schools we have occasional and sporadic relations, which have come about owing to the initiative of teachers who are interested in our experiences. We would like

to be able to meet the staff of elementary schools on a more regular basis, but this has still not been accomplished. However, it is at this stage that scholastic failure or success is determined.

With the literacy sector of the Chambly School Board, we have always maintained ties. In 1984, the budgets of Quebec school boards were more limited and we were able to benefit by contacting the young people who were on the waiting list. This collaboration changed when the literacy budgets in the school systems increased, while our budget remained unchanged. This disparity has always put a delicate kink in our relationship with the School Board. How can a relationship that is respectful of mutual skills be established, when one of the two partners is underfunded and its very future threatened? How can discussions as equals take place between an organization that has a staff of four and provides a service to 25 young people, and a school board that offers courses to over 400 people and administers a staff of around 50 employees?

Recognition of community education takes place on the political level. School boards are not our "enemies", even if they are decidedly privileged at our expense. They are not the ones who can change the situation, only a change in political trends in the long-term development of literacy can accomplish this. As was stated by a school board representative at a regional meeting: "Community groups have certain freedoms and a lot of latitude in determining their approach, but they have no money. It is the opposite with us; we have money, but we are up to our necks in administrative paperwork and have little room to manoeuvre."

The collaboration with the Chambly School Board was slow; mutual distrust had to be overcome. As we were convinced of the importance of our work, which did not intend to replace school but provided a different service, we openly made known our leanings. This brought about a frank and open atmosphere. Nevertheless, all collaboration boils down to a question of personal contact. Our openness and that of the director of the literary section was a determining factor in creating a positive relationship.

The relationship with the "drop-out school" has always been a weak and sporadic one. We have tried to get close to them, for we wanted to know the grade 7 program objectives, in order to refer the young people to the program. But there is strong mistrust; the directors of the "drop-out school" in Longueuil felt as if they were being attacked by our work and public activities. Also the fact that

several young people were quite straightforward in talking about their negative experiences in the special education classes of this high school, spoiled our relationship. Even though the idea was not to assign blame for illiteracy in young people, it was interpreted in this way. Sensibilities run very high in high school when there is mention of illiteracy.

Established as an experiment a few years ago, "drop-out schools" have spread across the province of Quebec. Their main objective is to enable those who have dropped out of high school to finish their studies. As such, they are part of the elementary and high school programs, even though they cater mainly to adults. This linking of "drop-out schools" with the elementary and high school program has the effect of distancing them from adult education. These two services often exist side by side without being aware of each other and while providing similar programs. There is duplication of services, and young people are sometimes passed to and fro between the two before finding the appropriate service.

Illiterate young people are rarely good candidates for "drop-out schools". Their learning needs are at the elementary school level, even though they are sometimes in possession of a "diploma" from a short vocational program. In "drop-out schools", the classes are organized in a very similar way to those of colleges. Everyone works independently and at their own pace. Special education classes are not very conducive to initiating the young people to this method of working.

"Drop-out schools" do not provide literacy training; this is not part of the mandate of high school. However, they too are being confronted with failure at school; they are starting to offer prerequisite classes for grade 7. It is not evident that the prerequisite class, like the school adjustment classes beforehand, lead the student to full integration into the regular program. Is this yet another crack in the system? What will be in it for the young person who has spent his schooling in special education classes, to find himself doing the same thing in "drop-out school"? It is better that a young person should become literate and set feasible goals for himself in order to function in society, rather than wasting his time in classes that claim to lead towards high school, without ever really getting there.

The general training that is offered to adults remains a highly compartmentalized network, which is a real maze for the young

person who is experiencing difficulties. Some people will move around for several months between drop-out school, failure in a prerequisite class and adult education in literacy. This bumping around is detrimental to the motivation of some, and leads several others to vegetate in inappropriate classes.

Other public organizations

Other services provided by public organizations in the area also have to be investigated: federal and provincial employment centres, the LCSCs, hospitals, protected workshops and the court-house. These organizations come into contact with young people, whether they want to or not. We have to make ourselves known to them, for they know only of adult education or "drop-out schools" for remedying weaknesses in education. For young people, these avenues will often lead to failure, because they are forced into them and because the school structure offered reminds them too much of their past failures.

Public organizations come into contact with a lot of people; their scope is wide-ranging and the services they offer are diversified and not widely known. The LCSCs offer courses on sexuality, provide health clinics for young people, abortion services, drop-in daycare centres and prenatal classes. The organizations involved with employment for the mentally handicapped provide consultation and evaluation services. Employment centres offer rehabilitation programs for women, etc.

Our involvement with these organizations must be planned and vigorous, for it is difficult work. Public organizations want to learn about community groups so long as community groups want to make themselves known to them. The onus is on community groups to take the first step. One must be bold, call back several times, jump through the bureaucratic hoops and have patience. It is difficult to establish contact, there are a lot of staff and one does not always know who is the right person to talk to. Their work schedule always seems to be very busy and civil servants do not necessarily see the use of meeting with us to discuss illiteracy. Once a meeting is finally set up, administrative constraints have to be adhered to.

Conclusion

The work at the Boîte à Lettres cannot simply be evaluated according to the progress made in literacy, given the difficult and demanding nature of this endeavour. Here, therefore, are my own criteria of success in judging the effectiveness of the work, which underlies and is the context of the literacy training process.

- That young people who drop out of the program without succeeding stay in contact with the organization. If they are able to find employment, feel more self-confident or feel better about themselves, this certainly reflects the quality of our work. A *long-term relationship of trust* has to be developed with the young people, so that they can overcome illiteracy and follow the process at their own pace. The young people who leave here, who talk about the organization with others, who come back to see us because they are concerned about how their child is doing in school, all this represents elements of success.

- That the organization be socially integrated into its area and that its partners continue to view it as a dependable, honest and permanent service. The organization must be known and recognized, as much by shopkeepers, the municipality and public organizations, as by community organizations. This recognition in the area requires patient and continual work; it is essential for the survival of the organization, especially in the light of budgetary cutbacks and takeover attempts. Our work is only legitimate if it helps to establish *ties of solidarity in the area*. In the same way, we are only effective, if we have a good understanding of the area and its characteristics.

- That the current staff, as well as the board of directors that supports and supervises it, be constantly evolving. Literacy training is too tricky a task to be carried out in a routine way. The strength of the organization essentially lies in the *enthusiasm and energy of its staff*. This is the cause of the instability of non-profit organizations, whose budgets cannot maintain stable teams. As a group leader, one must have the openness and the courage to question oneself, and to leave if one is worn out. Working in a community group is a very demanding and

thankless task; this is not a reason for doing it in a bureaucratic way and with a minimum of effort. Without a staff that is motivated to get involved and to take on the task of providing literacy training, the organization is doomed to fail.

- That literacy remain the basis of our involvement. Literacy training is a relatively new and demanding field. Everything is still to be done, whether it be program-based research, the development of evaluation tools, the development of objectives and learning material, the creation of texts adapted for adults, the introduction of computers, the evaluation of knowledge and so on. *Research and experimentation* must be a part of literacy training, while aiming for the best results possible.

- That our work succeeds in changing the ties that are present in the lives of illiterate young people. That the "partner" or the mother of the young person adopt new attitudes with regards to reading and the young person, so that the young person feels more at ease and can adopt *new "reader" attitudes*. Our work can only bring about results if it enables change to take place, if it completely change the past relationship that was created towards reading.

These five points sum up my vision of the strategies of involvement in literacy in a community group. Nevertheless, I have a dream of another vision of literacy. And, since nothing is impossible, I leave you with this dream that was shared by our initial team, comprising Pierre Stanton, Denis Bourgeois and myself, during endless and energetic discussions.

And if literacy was...
Something else than a new and improved school, in effect the opposite of school, where, behind closed doors, classes, learning, evaluations, etc. still take place.

I dream of a large community building where various community groups could stay. A common objective: to help young people to succeed, in all areas. There would be a work program in automobile body work and repairs, where young people would learn to repair cars, to prepare estimates and bills. There would be a recreation centre where young people would get together to watch

videos, organize a dance or plan a sports event. Next to the library, there would be a daycare centre for those who come to the centre; young people would play with the children, supervised by an experienced team.

Of course, there would be a literacy group, integrated with real life and with the other needs of young people, in a simple and tangible way, for immediate concerns such as long-term education. Some young people might only go to the recreation centre for two years, before undertaking the literacy process; they would then approach the group leaders, become aware of the uses of the literacy process while attempting to design a poster to announce a film.

And why not a sewing workshop, a permanent used clothing store for the people in the area? And why not an organization that deals with drug and alcohol problems? It is simply a matter of groups accepting sharing a common place, of consulting each other and of organizing themselves collectively, without losing their independence and without becoming a huge "machine". It is also simply a matter of having enough money to rent or (actually!) buy a building together.

Is it possible that one day literacy training will be integrated with the other needs of young people (that is in the same place, with teams that work collaboratively)? Is it possible that young people can learn basic work skills and responsibility, while providing services in the neighbourhood? Is it possible that this would be a different kind of school, a life school and a school that corresponds to the needs in the area? It is said that dreams are the food of daily life. So do not forget to dream!

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FROM SPECIALIZED TRAINING TO GRASS-ROOTS LITERACY EDUCATION

Mario Raymond
Louise Meunier
La Porte ouverte, Saint-Jean sur Richelieu, Canada

Porte ouverte is an autonomous Quebec literacy organization which operates in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and neighbouring towns. When it first began its work in 1984, and up until 1987, Porte ouverte did only pre-literacy work (awareness-recruiting). Since October 1988, the organization has handled all three phases of literacy education: "pre-lit", "lit", "post-lit", and it gives workshops in French and in arithmetic to the people of Haut-Richelieu.

Porte ouverte came into existence through the efforts of a group of educators working for the Honoré-Mercier Regional School Board Department of Adult Education (DAE), who wished to change the pre-literacy education environment; the organization slowly became transformed into an autonomous grass-roots literacy education group. This chapter describes the organization's development.

1. A Comprehensive Literacy Education Plan

Prior to 1978, individual requests for literacy education to the Honoré-Mercier School Board were forwarded to the Chambly School Board. In 1978 the DAE, which had been receiving a growing number of requests, established a basic French course. It was in carrying out these initial experiments that it became clear that it was important to involving the community in literacy education, and particularly in recruitment.

The Honoré-Mercier School Board then submitted to the Department of Education an action plan that had two objectives: to obtain financing for training activities, and, in particular, to prepare organizations in the community to assume responsibility for the pre- and post-literacy education phases. It was at the time felt, quite correctly, that such agencies are in the best position to penetrate

disadvantaged neighbourhoods and to enter into contact with illiterates.

In 1982, the plan was implemented. The DAE hired a full-time community organizer to set up volunteer committees responsible for introducing literacy education into each community within the school board's territory. The organizer's role consisted of looking for leaders in each of the local communities. The goal was to make it possible for local literacy committees to assume responsibilities for all non-pedagogical aspects of literacy education.

The DAE defined a model, called a "terminal" model, for the sharing of tasks and responsibilities between the community and the DAE. The model calls for a "local literacy committee" to take charge (responsibility and leadership) of the overall operation in each community: planning, organization, management, financing. The local committee is composed of resource persons in the community. The DAE is the pedagogical resource for teaching, programs, etc., and provides financing for training within the limits of its budget. "The local committee may, on its own initiative, organize and carry out pedagogical activities that complement the work of the instructor, ideally in concert with the instructor (cultural events, outreach, consciousness-raising, functional activities, etc.)."[1]

Implementation of the terminal model

The terminal model specified the fields of action for each of the partners involved. The selected group (ideally a local literacy committee) was to be placed in charge of the overall operation, while the DAE was to assume responsibility for one aspect of the operation only, the pedagogical component. The literacy committees were therefore assigned the responsibility of organizing the community and tracking down illiterates, and then attempting to induce them to take the elementary French course.

Questions of a pedagogical nature (requirements analysis, training, pedagogical follow-up, evaluation of learning, hiring educators) were the sole responsibility of the DAE, which retained the right to monitor literacy committee activities. The only area where the committees had full and total autonomy was financing, which was to be obtained "from a source other than the DAE".

The DAE nevertheless identified a number of risks involved in having community organizations take over such matters:

> Like other community agencies, associations or services, the DAE has its own specific role, its own expertise and its own special areas of responsibility... which it must shoulder and not assign to others in the community... N.B.: By encouraging "the community" to develop its specific role, its expertise and its responsibilities in an unrestricted fashion, the curious phenomenon of a parallel structure eventually arises, with paid professionals and employees in certain instances...[2]

Each literacy committee was established around one person responsible for running it - the educator hired by the School Board to give basic French courses. These key persons, supported by the community organizer, created a well-established core group in a number of areas, at least solid enough to supply students for a number of basic French classes for a few years. Literacy groups established under this process carried out a systematic recruiting of illiterates in the area. They had no budget and worked on a voluntary basis to organize pedagogical activities for the students.

The results for the School Board were altogether satisfactory, and the Board expected to withdraw its community organizer after three years. The educator's pay, linked as it was to the number of students enroled, was its only financial contribution. In the medium term, the plan made it possible to teach a good number of complete illiterates to read, and to maintain the number of basic French classes through which under-educated individuals were given the opportunity to learn a trade or pursue their secondary studies through adult education.

In Saint-Jean, the plan was not applied in the same way because the urban environment is more impersonal and the population larger. In the early stages of recruiting, the DAE was able quickly to set up a number of basic French classes. Several educators were therefore hired to teach during the evening at the comprehensive school. Unlike educators working in the regions, the Saint-Jean educators did not establish agencies to assure continuity. That is because at the time, the DAE was afraid that a parallel organization would be established that would encroach upon its educational mission.

The organizers hired to find students for the basic French classes also quickly exhausted potential sources of recruiting. Because they had no control after this initial phase, it was difficult for them to assess how effective their work was. When recruiting ceased to yield results, the organizers were disbanded.

Early efforts

The first literacy education experiment took place in 1982 in Farnham. The DAE recruited a small team of volunteers whose task was to make the community aware of the problem and to recruit illiterates. Seventy-four were recruited and 46 began to take instruction in the fall of 1982. The LE committee was established (Literacy Education, later re-named Adult Education).

Also in 1982, similar work was begun in Marieville. Community leaders established the Marieville local literacy committee, which quickly began its pre-literacy efforts. Sixty-three illiterates were recruited and 28 began their instruction in the 1982 winter session.

Little by little, DAE resource persons withdrew from the committee to let it manage its own affairs. Community awareness work was also done in Saint-Jean, where the DAE recruited 128 persons, 105 of whom began instruction in the fall of 1983. At the end of the year, it was recommended that a local literacy group be established to take the operation in hand.

The birth of Porte Ouverte

The DAE resource persons who helped to set up the Farnham and Marieville groups submitted an application for a job creation program to the federal government to make the public aware of illiteracy and to recruit illiterates in Saint-Jean, Iberville, and in the region (over 56,000 inhabitants). The program, which was sponsored by Relado Inc., an agency that provides assistance to adolescents, was implemented in late 1983. This period was in effect the pioneer phase of literacy education in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu.

Three organizers were hired for a six-month period, and assigned the task of making the public aware of illiteracy and of recruiting illiterates to enrol in DAE literacy education activities. These were the people who did the real spadework. Virtually every method of community awareness enhancement was tried (door to door, at-home meetings, leaflets enclosed in pay envelopes, etc.). The results were convincing: 177 of the persons reached began training in the 1984 winter session.

In 1984, the DAE seriously considered establishing a local pre-literacy group in Saint-Jean to perform the role defined in the 1982 terminal model. An interim group was established but, unlike

Farnham and Marieville, the group did not consist of community leaders, but rather members of the DAE (organizers, educators, resource persons). Two names were put forward: "À Livre ouvert" and "La Porte ouverte". The second name was selected.

Porte ouverte was incorporated as an association for the promotion of literacy, with its terms of reference strictly limited to promoting the DAE literacy education program, without any direct involvement in training itself. The agency's articles of incorporation were also very clear: "GENERAL OBJECTIVE: to promote the literacy education program through activities other than training (which is the preserve of adult education)"[3].

At the time, Porte ouverte was more an offshoot of the DAE than a Saint-Jean community group. Porte ouverte could best be described as a DAE appendage assigned the task of independently financing a pre-literacy phase that it would be difficult for the Department of Education to finance. Porte ouverte was given a great deal of freedom, but it proved impossible to give it the means required to make its activities permanent. The problem remains equally serious today.

2 The Financing of Pre-Literacy Activities

The School Board and community agencies were unanimous in considering the pre-literacy groundwork as a necessary and indeed indispensable prerequisite to training. It was therefore of the greatest importance to make sure that such action, which since 1985 had been the full responsibility of Porte ouverte, should be successful. How could an embryonic agency like Porte ouverte shoulder such heavy responsibilities? The mandate assigned to Porte ouverte was enormous: to put down roots among a population spread over 11 municipalities, with a total of approximately 60,000 inhabitants, among whom no less than 15,000 adults were considered illiterate in varying degrees.

To make itself known, Porte ouverte had to find a distinctive personality to set it apart from the School Board. But how was it to do so when its members were mostly School Board employees, and the agency itself was housed in board facilities? Funding bodies did not fully understand why a community agency was asking for their financial assistance for activities that fell within the School

Board's purview. They did not fully understand that Porte ouverte was not funded by the DAE, and that the DAE simply happened to be the prime beneficiary of Porte ouverte's community action.

For all these different reasons, direct fund raising in the community was a failure. Hence the appeal to governments. In Quebec City, the program to provide assistance to adult education agencies, the only possible source of funding, was frozen. The last hope was the federal government. It was thanks to the manpower retraining programs (Canada Works, Article 38, Job Development Program) that Porte ouverte was able to finance most of its activities in the field.

Such programs unfortunately have disadvantages. Their purpose is not to sustain subsidized agencies, but to develop the employment skills of the participants by giving them training and job experience. Agencies that are able to provide the best training, and eventually to hire the participants, are obviously given preferential treatment. Porte ouverte, whose underpinnings remained flimsy, and which could not even hire its own employees, was bringing up the rear.

The agency was nevertheless able to obtain funding for at least one program of this type every year, but in each instance, the projects were temporary. At most, they made it possible for Porte ouverte to continue to work in the field full-time six months of the year, with the other six being the responsibility of voluntary workers, some of whom could at best handle one basic course in French at the DAE.

As was noted in 1987, "for literacy agencies, the piecemeal financing provided by job development programs is obviously not ideal. It does not allow for continuity and makes any kind of follow-up action impossible. Volunteers can fill the gap, but they quickly run out of steam, and the needs of illiterates remain just as pressing as ever.[4]" "The work therefore has to be done all over again, and always for a limited period of time.[5]"

Owing to the nature of federal temporary employment programs, field workers, who inevitably are chronically unemployed, came to Porte ouverte primarily to acquire job experience that would enable them to find work elsewhere once the project was over. This has resulted in a steady turnover in personnel over the years, and a built-in instability in literacy efforts. (From 1983 to 1989, no less than 13 persons held the position of Porte ouverte field organizer.)

This meant that volunteers had an ever heavier burden to bear. They had to do the work between projects, and each year submit new requests to set up additional programs. When the response to their request was positive, they were the people who had to train the newcomers, who were nearly always new to the literacy education field. Such a situation was much too demanding for volunteers who did not have a special interest in literacy education, and perhaps for the educators as well.

The year 1985 was thus one in which many volunteers were demobilized. DAE educators and teaching assistants alike withdrew from Porte ouverte, leaving it in the hands of field organizers hired on contract and the remaining members of the Board of Directors (most of whom were themselves illiterates). This general demobilization was to last three years, during which a handful of determined individuals carried the torch of literacy education. It ended only when Porte ouverte decided to reorient its action.

In spite of it all, the field work carried out over all these years yielded tangible results and gave Porte ouverte recognized expertise in pre-literacy education.

3. **Field Organization Methods**

Porte ouverte earned recognition in literacy circles as a specialist in the pre-literacy phase. With seven years of field work under its belt, and the experience of no less than 13 field workers, Porte ouverte was able to acquire genuine expertise. We shall now speak of the various communication organization activities implemented from the beginning, and the results obtained, in chronological order.

The responsibilities of the field organizers included consciousness-raising in the community and recruiting illiterates for the DAE basic French course.[6] In 1988, responsibilities were added for taking the action required to make Porte ouverte autonomous from the DAE.

1983-1984: Pioneering phase

The year 1983 marked the beginning of the phase in which agencies took over the pre-literacy area. For the first time in Saint-Jean, organizers from outside the school board worked autonomously in the field. From 1981 to 1982, a small publicity campaign was all

it took to recruit enough students for the basic French courses, and the DAE could not accommodate any more than this without running a deficit on its budget.

In 1983, three organizers were hired under the federal NEED Program for 23 weeks of field work. Their first task would require a great deal of preparation and hold a number of surprises for them: "To our great surprise, most people were incredulous when we told them about the statistics we had collected.[6]"

After four weeks of preparation, the organizers left for the field. All agencies were contacted, first by telephone to make them aware of literacy education, followed by a request for a meeting; at the meetings that were held, ad hoc assistance was requested (to distribute publicity material, organize information meetings and, in some instances, to prepare a list of persons who might be illiterate). The purpose of these contacts was to reach as many people as possible in the community, and to penetrate the community.

When all the work was completed, no less than 613 addresses were contacted and 677 persons met. The recruiting results were convincing: 192 persons took part in the exercise and 177 enrolled in basic French courses in the 1984 winter session.

The number of persons recruited was impressive for the amount of time devoted to the operation (23 weeks). Although much remained to be done in the community, literacy was no longer seen as a problem that affected only the third world. Illiteracy at home undoubtedly existed; everyone was now aware of it, and literacy education could become a community affair.

1984-1985: Action focus

After field work had been interrupted for a few months because of a lack of financing, Porte ouverte obtained the services of a new team through another employment program (Article 38). Three organizers were hired for a 20-week period, and assigned approximately the same objectives as those hired under the previous project: to make the general public aware of the problem and to recruit illiterates for the 1985 winter session. In carrying out its terms of reference, the team placed a focus on various types of action:

- to encourage the development of a literacy education service at Lacolle;

- to identify unemployed young people, former students and drop-outs;

- to begin to take action in downtown Saint-Jean.[7]

Porte ouverte's action was defined both by the targets it selected and the manner in which it evaluated its activities. The general comments, recommendations and suggested follow-up action for future programs that were included at the end of the activity report show that continuity was already a concern.

Special attention was paid to young people. Lists were prepared of young people who were unemployed, who had completed the short vocational training course, and of graduates and drop-outs from the abridged vocational course. Approximately 10 youths showed an interest in the courses or enrolled in them. But it could be seen that most of those who had taken the abridged vocational course were working and had little time to devote to any kind of course. Moreover, more than one was scared off by bad memories of school.

An attempt was also made to create a literacy centre at Lacolle, a small rural community.

In the same year, a new program was established. Two of the organizers from the previous program remained, and a third joined the team. Work in the field continued. An experiment to hold kitchen meetings in a rural environment proved to be an excellent way to make people aware of illiteracy.

1985-1986: Between projects

From the fall of 1985 to the winter of 1986, nothing at all was happening. The federal programs were exhausted, and they were the only available source of financing at the time. Porte ouverte submitted a request for interim financing to the DAE while awaiting a new project. The DAE authorities agreed, but on condition that Porte ouverte do the field work over the entire School Board territory (as well as at Saint-Jean and Lacolle, and at Farnham and Marieville).

The two remaining organizers agreed to the DAE proposal, but quickly became aware that "the DAE contribution does not allow for serious action in the short-term in each region.[8]" It was therefore decided to take concerted action to submit a joint project for all the regions, which involved placing an organizer in each locality and a field work coordinator in the region.

During this time, each committee, with the help of the Porte ouverte organizers, did only a small amount of community awareness work. Community groups were contacted in Marieville, Farnham and Lacolle. An effort was made to create an educational workshop for young people on social assistance in Saint-Jean, with the cooperation of the Quebec Work Centre. Unfortunately, the organizers had to abandon these efforts owing to a shortage of time.

One thing quickly became clear to everyone: the rural environment has nothing to do with the urban environment. At the annual field meetings, where each committee was represented, it was noted that there were professional organizers in Saint-Jean and semi-voluntary educators in the region. A leadership crisis quickly developed which clearly confirmed that the DAE method had failed in the city.

1986: Towards complementary services

A major new regional project was begun in 1986. "The federal funding program was requested in order to provide the regions with a full-time employee. But the job was temporary. Employees were to be supervised by the local committees, and they were given the opportunity to think about and to take part in our future in the short term, and not merely be considered recruits for the fall of 1986 session.[8]"

Five persons were hired. Their terms of reference, which went well beyond awareness enhancement and recruiting, included bringing new blood to each of the committees, becoming full members of the committees, and working both within the committee and in the community.

After three years of pre-literacy education work, the results in Saint-Jean were disturbing. The level of recruiting was dropping dramatically. The time had come to disband the Porte ouverte Board of Directors. The educators - all of whom were employed by the DAE - left, leaving the agency in the hands of the organizers.

Porte ouverte suddenly became, like the persons in charge of it, a temporary agency. In fact, "the Porte ouverte agency no longer exists in between course sessions.[9]"

As early as 1985, this realization led to fundamental second thoughts about the agency's role: "Porte ouverte, by offering the service to another agency, is having trouble gaining recognition (remains unknown) and is not included on the list of recognized community agencies. In view of this situation, we believe that follow-up action with respect to the awareness program ought to be to concentrate on establishing concrete activities that directly meet the people's needs.[9]"

It had become essential for Porte ouverte to establish a distinctive literacy service in order to earn special recognition in the literacy environment, and to assume a distinctive role. Porte ouverte existed only for others: the School Board, especially its educators, who benefited from the jobs created for them by recruiting. The agency sought an identity that would break the vicious circle.

Why work for the School Board, which can neither finance it nor recognize a role for it? Simply because the School Board was still the only institution with the right educational credentials in literacy training. To break away from the DAE would have been suicidal. Little by little, it was necessary for Porte ouverte to become involved in activities, which over time would make it essential. The first efforts in the downtown area, the initial attempts to create awareness in businesses, and the workshops, were all attempts by the agency to give it a profile in those communities where the School Board was not present, to acquire its credentials as an agency that complements the Board.

The incumbent organizer and the regional coordinator decided to establish a reception service for illiterates who had been identified. The service consisted of "welcoming individuals (particularly at the group facility) in a manner to create a relaxed climate more conducive to genuine dialogue.[5]" It was presented as an alternative to the depersonalized manner in which the School Board receives people. Both the linguistic and experiential requirements of the individual were analyzed as part of the process. Basic French courses were offered to meet reading and writing needs. Complementary community resources were also recommended when other needs were identified (problems with alcohol, drugs, marital violence, etc.).

Because the reception and evaluation service had previously been exclusively the responsibility of the School Board, it was necessary to obtain approval from DAE authorities to provide such a service. It proved to be no easy matter.

Members of Porte ouverte argued with the DAE that they were more accessible and that they could give all the time needed to everyone because they would be providing the service on a voluntary basis. This accessibility was the most important factor for Porte ouverte which, as we saw, had to distinguish the services it was offering from those provided by the DAE.

The DAE argued that it was dangerous to place a service that was considered indispensable in the hands of a temporary agency. According to the DAE, nothing guaranteed that Porte ouverte would always be there to provide the service, once the project had been completed. Porte ouverte further pointed out with respect to the survival argument that although Porte ouverte might not be there at the end of the project to provide the service, not allowing it to provide the service would almost certainly seal its fate once the project was completed. There was therefore not really any choice, and it was necessary to gamble bravely on its survival.

Negotiations lasted two months, and it was finally agreed that Porte ouverte would be given carte blanche. The results were convincing: the number of registrations increased significantly and, in particular, the withdrawal rate during the session decreased considerably (at least among those who registered through Porte ouverte). Sixteen persons enrolled in the basic French course, including 14 newcomers, 86% of whom were in the introductory levels. Of these, 82% continued their training to the end of the session.

With respect to the indispensable community work, the situation was less sanguine. For the first time, Porte ouverte found itself with only one organizer in the field to serve a population of over 60,000. The challenge was a major one: to make the public more aware, to recruit more illiterates, and to provide a new reception service. All in all, it was necessary to do more with less.

This meant that it was no longer possible to go door-to-door visiting all the community groups, and to survey the whole area searching for places to speak about literacy. Owing to a shortage of human and financial resources, Porte ouverte had to make choices about targets, and had to select targets that were easier to reach.

Hence the organizer and the regional coordinator decided to build a network of contacts and cooperative ventures with those community groups most likely to encounter illiterates. Approximately 20 government and community agencies were contacted. The cooperation agreement took the following form:

> First the group (background) and services (evaluation-motivation-enrollment) are described. Front-line workers are then asked to provide services to the group of persons concerned. If the individual shows interest, he or she is asked whether details can be passed on to the group (name and telephone number).
>
> If the answer is affirmative, the agency supplies us with the details. We then enter into contact with the individual and volunteer to evaluate his or her reading and writing skills. We then make an appointment to meet the person at home or at the group facilities, depending on the person's preference.
>
> The group therefore commits itself to two things:
>
> 1) to provide personalized service to the adult,
>
> 2) to provide the associated agency with follow-up on the individual's progress.[5]

The results proved to be very positive with respect to community commitment. A process like this assigns responsibility to individuals and to their agency by making them aware of the important role they play in the community. In addition, the regional coordination provided by Porte ouverte generated dialogue among the organizers and each of the localities. The end result was consensus about what forms of action ought to be taken, and a degree of solidarity, and these in turn led at the end of the year to the establishment of a regional representative agency, called the Groupe régional d'intervention Alpha (GRIA) [Regional Literacy Action Group (RLAG)].

1987: Regionalization

In 1987, the recently established Regional Literacy Action Group took responsibility for pre-literacy education work throughout the

territory. The RLAG had been created as a result of the desire to combine the efforts of the four local literacy committees and to eliminate the leadership problem, which was making it appear that Porte ouverte was in a strong position in relation to the other three literacy groups and the School Board.

A new program was established. Four persons were hired: three field organizers and one regional coordinator. The main problem was anticipated from the very outset: four points of service, the required coordination, and... only four persons in the field.

Porte ouverte, which till then had provided regional leadership, was assigned responsibility for regional coordination. The issue of leadership was far from being resolved. The three regional local committees demanded the services of a field organizer. It was finally agreed that each sub-region would be assigned a field organizer for the duration of the project. Porte ouverte had to content itself with one full-time regional coordinator, assisted by a part-time organizer.

When an organizer works alone, double duty is required. The field work is kept to a minimum, while the objectives remain the same: public awareness and recruiting, not to mention reception.

In the field, the world of industry, which is closed and which harbours so many individuals in need, becomes a priority. The comments made at the end of the program are eloquent:

> In this era of changing technologies, the basic training requirements for adults are becoming increasingly pressing. This means that efforts to make people aware and to provide them with information become all the more necessary...
>
> In the short term, industry will have to identify a prime target. Contact with this target group will have to go beyond politely receiving people without any concrete follow-up action. Some industries in the area have too many illiterate workers to be able to pretend that they are unaware of the situation.[4]

From the organizational standpoint, Porte ouverte found itself in a very bad position: a single employee, half paid, half volunteer, surrounded by a micro-team of three volunteers. It was up to the organizer virtually single-handedly to handle the burdensome task of keeping Porte ouverte afloat. In the opinion of the few remaining

members, and in view of recent experience, radical change was needed.

At the same time as a decidedly urban strategy was being developed, with efforts made to maintain the best possible contacts with the School Board, it became essential to consider providing training on our own suited to the needs of those identified in recent years. The purpose was to plan an active role in the community, and at the same time search for financing from the only possible source other than the Board, the Adult Education Branch, which had not yet given any grants to an agency exclusively dedicated to recruiting and promotion.

From this standpoint, the year 1988 was to be a turning point.

4. Summary

Lack of recognition for the status of field organizers

We saw above that the status of field organizers is precarious in the extreme. While no one working in literacy education really has security, the field organizer is at the bottom of the ladder. From the very outset, the field organizer knows that work will be for a limited time, at most six months, during which efforts will have to be made to learn more about the community, about the work environment, about the services to be provided, and about general literacy issues, if an action plan is ultimately to be formulated. Now six months is a very short time, especially when the post-project phase has to be considered.

In addition, the work of the field organizer, although essential, has little recognition. "The pre-literacy work remains the poor relation in the redistribution of funds, and yet it is the very engine of the literacy education mission."[10] Because the organizer has become the driving force of Porte ouverte, the agency as a whole has been saddled with the precarious status of the field organizer.

The pre-literacy education phase remains the only responsibility of literacy groups like Porte ouverte. Such groups are therefore required to take responsibility for obtaining financing, for training organizers, and for providing a framework for their work in order to be able to obtain the best possible results (for the DAE, it goes without saying, this means the number of enrolments). At Saint-

Jean, because the DAE's recruiting is primarily among young drop-outs, Porte ouverte's contribution, in spite of all the effort, is perceived as marginal (barely 15 per cent of basic education). It is nevertheless Porte ouverte that recruits most of the total illiterates, but this demanding work is taken for granted.

In fact, the pre-literacy education work, although it is essential, is discreet and not well recognized. This lack of recognition comes not only from the School Board, but also from community agencies, which do not readily understand what role Porte ouverte has to play in literacy education. It is easy enough to understand that people who have little or no education may require basic education, but it is difficult to explain why they cannot go and obtain it where it is available. At best, Porte ouverte is seen as the School Board's publicity department. This lack of recognition extends to those who receive the service; even though they are convinced that Porte ouverte is effective, they have trouble dissociating it from the School Board.

For Porte ouverte, the lack of continuity is an impediment to any form of recognition, and also to any hopes for development. Being restricted to pre-literacy education work results in a lack of knowledge about the overall operation. This means that "selling literacy" becomes all the more difficult. Because literacy education is part of a comprehensive effort to give people autonomy, it is difficult to be effective if one aspect is isolated. We became specialized in one specific area, but remain neophytes in others.

Problems in financing pre-literacy education

The lack of recognition for the pre-literacy education phase naturally leads to problems in obtaining autonomous financing. The Department of Education is reluctant to recognize and finance a so-called autonomous agency whose awareness-recruiting services appear to be supported directly by an institution that is already financed by government.

When financing is obtained for pre-literacy education, it is received only indirectly. Job development programs, which finance employability enhancement for the chronically unemployed, and not the activities of the group, are an excellent illustration of this. Porte ouverte has had more than its share of federal programs (eight in six years). In recent years, it had become obvious that the well would

soon run dry. The welcome received from the federal MP gave an ever-clearer indication of what was to come. It was explained that Porte ouverte had already received considerable funding, always for the same type of activity, and that other agencies which were generally more innovative, were still waiting for seed money.

Where we stand

In 1988, after five years of pre-literacy education work, the time had come to take stock. No less than 11 persons had held the position of field organizer. Of these, one was still - temporarily? - in the field. The Board of Directors had run out of steam and been disbanded. Porte ouverte was still awaiting another employment project, and this time, the battle was far from won. A great deal of effort had been expended on the RLAG, and the results had been lean. Our services remained little known and barely acknowledged. Prospects for development were virtually non-existent. The four remaining members of the Board of Directors, who were tired of regularly having to pull from its death-bed an agency in which they had invested a great deal, needed to take stock.

It had been noted, for example, through contacts with those who took the courses, that the DAE services did not meet all requirements. Some more practical needs (such as preparing a shopping list, budgeting, reading work instructions, etc.) were not being met. Moreover, training at the comprehensive school had disheartened many, particularly among young drop-outs.

For Porte ouverte, it therefore appeared to be of the essence to assume the whole literacy education operation, which basically means that people in need ought not to be left without services, and that they should be provided for as effectively as possible throughout the process.

This new direction involved three major objectives:

- follow-up throughout the learning process;
- implementation of an adult education literacy program;
- recognition and financing of our action (and at the same time handling of the pre-literacy education phase).

The end objective of doing so was to develop the autonomy of the group and earn recognition for it. This was already a concern of the field organizers in 1985: "In view of the situation, we feel that, following the public awareness work, it would be important to concentrate on consolidating an autonomous group to provide leadership in a comprehensive literacy education program.[9]"

The new direction certainly created shock waves within the DAE and member groups of the RLAG. Among the former, there would of course be concerns about duplication of services, while among the latter, there was talk of backroom politicking and a change in the agency's role. Today, one year later, people have calmed down and the initial reluctance has given way to a degree to understanding and confidence.

With this important change under way, opportunities for development, and for financing, appear to be much more numerous. The targeted activities remain the same: industry, research, preparation of instructional materials and the establishment of a documentation centre, a project which has now been completed. In short, these are certainly all activities that can be financed by job development programs, but by various departments and agencies whose mandate covers the social and economic sphere.

Formulating new objectives is one thing, but meeting them is another. One needs the means to guide the ship safely into port. In this, the 1988 job development program was to play a determining role.

5. **From Piecemeal Action to Comprehensive Action**

Two organizers succeeded one another in the field. It was clearly established from the very outset that their committee work was as important as their community work, as was also the case in 1986. Their very broad mandate consisted of making the agency as autonomous as possible in the eyes of the community, and of continuing to pursue awareness-recruiting and reception work.

The first organizer, who had solid experience as an educator, was committed to creating pedagogical tools. She prepared an analytical grid of practical requirements and a bank of teaching materials for practical workshops. Unfortunately, she had to leave her position in the middle of the project. The work begun remains unfinished.

The organizer who took over from her had more experience in public relations, and the agency therefore made an effort to make use of her specific skills. She quickly established an action plan:

1. Make the agency autonomous
   - through a board of directors that is representative of the community
   - through more satisfactory financial arrangements.
2. Provide the agency with recognized expertise in literacy education.
3. Take steps to obtain financing.
4. Make approaches to industry.[11]

Board of Directors

To establish the agency's credibility in the community, the organizer set about recruiting people with a high profile in the community to serve on the Board of Directors. Six new members joined the Board. Included among them were two retired teachers, one educational consultant, one person who was in charge of a group of parents of children experiencing learning problems, and one librarian. The members of the previous Board of Directors, the members of Porte ouverte, and a former student remained to oversee the transition. Somewhat later, it was jointly agreed that in order for the agency truly to set down roots in the community, the field organizers would withdraw from the Board. It quickly became apparent that it was both difficult and demanding for the Board and for the field organizers to function in such a way. Because the role of the Board is corporate administration and policy making, it required constant input from the grassroots. For the field organizers, who were already overburdened with work, such an enterprise quickly proved to be exhausting. Moreover, the Board sometimes got the impression when issues were submitted that the decisions had already been taken.

The situation rapidly created pressures: the Board felt useless and the organizers increasingly questioned its role. Members of the Board soon resigned from their duties, leaving Porte ouverte in the hands of its organizers.

An agency that has been entirely controlled by its organizers for years does not readily accept such radical change in its decision-making process. A Board of Directors that includes members of the

community is nevertheless desirable. It makes it possible for the agency better to penetrate the community, and allows the community to gain a better understanding of the overall illiteracy and community literacy education issues. But any such efforts to improve relations require proper preparation and regular follow-up on the various matters in hand. This means that having organizers on the Board is more than desirable, it is inevitable.

New services

The idea for comprehensive action in the literacy field had been around for some time: all that remained was to put it into practice. As International Literacy Year approached (1990), we seized the opportunity afforded by the lifting of the freeze on the program to provide assistance to voluntary community education agencies, and decided, in order to be able better to meet the needs expressed, that the time had come in September 1988 to move wholeheartedly into the field of training.

The organizer decided to publicize the new services, and Porte ouverte held a regional public awareness day to inform community groups about its new directions.

The reception in the community was more than enthusiastic. Everyone quickly recognized the soundness of our approach and the need for a new type of action. Everyone also recognized that they had to bear their share of responsibility in the battle against illiteracy, and said that they were ready to support our efforts. The idea, so dear to organizers, of getting the community involved in the battle against illiteracy was finally beginning to take a concrete form.

On the strength of this support, the organizers enthusiastically set up the first literacy workshops. Educators were recruited, initially within the agency. The authors of this paper, who are already working there, added two voluntary educators chosen for their commitment to literacy rather than their CVs or their academic credentials. Ordinary people to teach ordinary people to read and write: that was the selection criterion.

Two groups of participants were set up. The first, which came from the working world, consisted of female workers from the textile industry. Their needs were very practical: prepare a budget, prepare a curriculum vitae, familiarize themselves with resources in

educational and job-related orientation, etc. The workshop, called "social training", had three objectives: to make the participants aware of their strengths, to help them individually and collectively take stock of their situation; to develop their personal autonomy and their determination as a social group. The contents of the course still included teaching them to write. Essays and exercises in writing French were also part of the workshops.

The second group consisted of participants who were taking the DAE basic French course. The workshop, called "functional workshop", was designed to reinforce the subject matter covered in the classroom. For the educators involved in this workshop, the task required presenting the course material given by the DAE educator in a new way. This, as one might well imagine, required a considerable amount of creativity, because some people who were slower learners had to attempt several different approaches before being able to assimilate the subject matter. The workshop had six objectives: to get all participants involved in the process; to make them feel comfortable with the process; to keep motivation up; to play down the difficulty of learning French; to encourage mutual cooperation, to make participants aware of what they had already learned and experienced.

Participation

But above all else, the Porte ouverte workshops made it possible to develop a new attitude among the participants, who quickly progressed from being simple students to being partners in the agency.

To begin with, the workshops encouraged participation. As a result, the participants had a considerable impact on how training activities were carried out: the workshop contents were decided by them on the basis of needs expressed; as for timetables and length of training, they decided these matters in concert with the educators. It was, for example, at their request that the daytime workshop was changed from one to two periods a week during the year.

The participants felt that they had genuine decision-making power about their individual and collective training. No longer were they required to follow training that was defined in advance and to which they had to adapt.

This new participation dynamic was soon to spill over well beyond the workshops into other areas. Some participants wanted to play a more active role in the activities as a whole. One participant is currently a member of the Board of Directors.

Conclusions

We now find it much easier to promote literacy in the community. We know what we are talking about. Porte ouverte is therefore gaining increased recognition as a community resource. There is no longer any hesitation in referring to Porte ouverte people who may have had difficulty fitting into adult education programs. A new solidarity, and a new partnership, have emerged from the community.

Training experience made it possible for the agency to acquire new expertise. Porte ouverte was able to create new pedagogical tools, as well as a distinctive approach. We believe, as the maxim says, that in all fields "practice makes perfect". Restricting oneself to only one facet of the business would be like a blacksmith lighting the fire and using the bellows, while leaving to others the task of shaping the metal.

But above all else, what broadening the field of endeavour will have brought is the recognition that has been so highly sought after by all organizers who have worked with Porte ouverte. Their tireless effort has finally been recognized at its true worth. Organizers are no longer simply passing through, but truly feel a part of a cause that they dearly believe in.

Today, an increasing number of volunteers and voluntary groups who are sensitive to the literacy issue are coming to lend us a hand. The "literacy family" is growing every day. A new Board of Directors, consisting of organizers, illiterates and members of the community who are very well versed in the literacy issue, are doing remarkable work in providing a framework and performing a representative function in the community. The results of their work are tangible. Two social clubs got together to pay rent for the next two years. Religious communities have made a commitment to keep Porte ouverte operating for at least the next three years. Equipment donations have made it possible to furnish and organize efficient facilities. A weekly column in the local newspaper allows us to reach a wider public.

Porte ouverte now runs four workshops per week for 35 persons. Because demand is so heavy, negotiations for the financing of course hours have begun with the School Board. Since the summer of 1989, the agency has had a completely computerized documentation centre with no less than 500 titles.

Today, Porte ouverte is a member of the Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec (Quebec Association of Community Literacy Education Groups) and of the Table régionale des organismes volontaires d'éducation populaire de la Montérégie (Regional Federation of Voluntary Community Education Agencies in the Montérégie Area). These new links stimulate dialogue and the resourcing of our organizers, and at the same time strengthen our common cause: the recognition of autonomous grassroots education. Given that illiteracy is a social fact, we believe that it is only together that we can truly deal with it.

6. **Future Prospects**

Only the future will show whether our decisions have been correct. The change that has been effected was the logical outcome of a process and a review that have been under way for some years now.

Let us recall the highlights. To begin with, the awareness-recruiting work, which led us to question the way in which illiterates ought to be reached, and further led us to want to work more directly with the people. Then, the establishment of the reception service, which made it possible for us to identify more accurately the needs of illiterates, and hence to provide a more accurate evaluation of the usefulness of the services provided. And lastly, the findings concerning these practices, which underscored the need for a form of training that was different from that provided in the adult education mould.

Porte ouverte therefore went from being an appendage of the School Board to a complementary resource and then an alternative resource. Current prospects must be seen as an extension of this process.

With respect to public awareness, industry remains a priority target. The work has begun, but much remains to be done to open up this sector, which has long been off-limits to literacy education.

The development of services also remains a constant concern. It is necessary to consolidate what we have learned in pre-literacy education, and to develop post-literacy education, by getting illiterates involved to the greatest extent possible.

The development of educators is also a priority. Our participation in the training program of the Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec allows educators to familiarize themselves with the various practices in use in the literacy field.

The commitment of all sectors of the community to the battle against illiteracy remains our objective. We believe more than ever that illiteracy is a social problem which goes well beyond the mere educational dimension. That is why we plan to continue to work towards having the community deal directly with the problem.

The road travelled by Porte ouverte since it was founded has been mined with problems, some of which led the agency to the brink. It was only because of remarkable individual effort, as well as collective effort, that it is still possible today to speak of a Porte ouverte in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu.

Porte ouverte, which began as a volunteer sub-contractor, with a shaky status, working in the shadows, has today become a full partner in the community. Its principal objective, which has always been to involve the community in the battle against illiteracy, remains a constant concern, and Porte ouverte believes that it is better equipped than ever before to meet it.

We hope that this short history of Porte ouverte has given the reader some idea of the role played in our society by grassroots literacy education. We also believe, modestly, that it could perhaps inspire a new generation of literacy education organizers, and that it might enable them to avoid the pitfalls that stood in our way.

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WOMEN AND LITERACY: A VITAL MOVEMENT

Elise de Coster
La Jarnigoine, Montréal, Canada

In Touch with Realities

The popular promotion of literacy consists of a set of practices and actions directed at disadvantaged social groups, and essentially aims at producing greater autonomy in individuals. The popular groups working to eliminate illiteracy have the will to anchor themselves in the reality of the environments in which they work so as to act in accordance with the needs, values and interests of illiterate persons. To them, the elimination of illiteracy is not simply teaching people how to read, write and do arithmetic, it is also a process of reflection and of individual and collective expression.

Learning to read and write is only one of the aspects of the battle for autonomy. In order to act effectively, it is necessary to take into account the factors that condition or determine the reality of illiterate persons so as to be able to attack the root of the social problems which foster and produce illiteracy. From this point of view, to act is to make a political gesture with the aim of sparking awareness, of arousing a will to change and of adapting literacy to social realities.

In the course of their work, the women who act as group literacy leaders have learned certain facts[1] which have led them to ponder a little-known reality: illiteracy among women.

Women attend the popular groups, places traditionally reserved for the most deprived persons, in great numbers. Their average age is generally high. Their access to literacy resources appears to be limited by factors related to their role within the family. Highly motivated, they nevertheless receive little encouragement from those close to them, and the reasons for absences or quitting are often connected with family pressures.

In the workshops, they say little and rarely discuss their preoccupations. While illiterate women may be able to manage in situations familiar to them, they are nevertheless lacking in resources, or even completely at a loss when confronted by the unex-

pected. Humiliated and made to feel inferior, they are little inclined to communicate.

Above all, women want a place that is completely free of any form of behaviour produced by the relations of dominance and subordination which, for the most part, have characterised their lives since their childhood. Sexist attitudes end in submission and reduce them to silence. This type of relationship continues to be very common in mixed groups. The women feel trapped and reduced to a condition which they no longer want to experience. They desire henceforth to concentrate and work in a context which encourages learning.

At present, the idea of conceiving and setting up workshops exclusively for women is very rare in Quebec in the field of literacy work, both in the educational institutions and in the popular groups. Lack of resources and non-recognition of the problems of women are the two principal reasons. Even so, in the groups in which certain activities are addressed to women only, the group leaders have quickly noticed a change: the participants are able to carve out a niche for themselves, to occupy the space progressively and to create a favourable climate for expressing themselves. They talk about themselves and the various aspects of their lives more easily. They soon show the desire to come together in order to define the conditions they consider essential for learning as well as to experiment with educational tools which meet their expectations.

In order thoroughly to understand the need to establish non-mixed groups in popular education centres, it is necessary to look at learning in the broad sense. Cognitive functioning, the acquisition of ideas and the habits essential for mastering reading, writing and arithmetic are only one of the aspects of the process, since illiteracy often appears as a general difficulty in self-expression. The act of learning, that is, of receiving and transmitting information, of modifying one's knowledge and grafting new elements onto it, is intimately associated with the capacity for communicating with others. In the context of adult education, this should be kept in mind and related to the motivations of individuals, their previous experiences and their attitudes with respect to learning. Workshops reserved for women therefore offer new advantages.

Isolation and lack of information limit the access of illiterate women to the resources within the environment that could give them the means to change their reality. On the other hand, group leaders

who work in fields other than literacy training have difficulty in approaching the issue; they cannot recognize the various forms of illiteracy, discern the problems it creates and determine which literacy resources should be used to assist the illiterate.

Very little documentation can be found on illiterate women. The statistics, which are rare and often contradictory, frequently relate to the amount of schooling or the general phenomenon of illiteracy. Its particular nature among women is never presented as a point of departure for work. Once again, women seem to be ignored or absent from the story.

In order to remedy this situation, the group leaders have attempted, by means of research work and various projects, to draw a more accurate picture of the illiterate women who attend their centres, in order to assist them more effectively in taking charge of themselves and of the world surrounding them.

Examining the Details - Developing the Theory

Women experience a personal oppression which gives rise to specific conditions of life

Spurred on by the desire and will to involve the women of the Centre as "active and motivating" subjects of their research project[2], the group leaders of the Centre de lecture (CLÉ) chose the form of life histories in order to define better the reality of illiterate women.

From interviews with eight participants, there emerged an exchange of life experiences, a communication rich in emotion. Twelve hours of tape were set down in about 200 pages: a collection of witness statements which were dissected and organized by subject matter in order to protect the anonymity of the participants and to produce a synthesis which transcends the personal. As the details are examined, the theory is developed.

At the same time, the group leaders[3] in Villeray, at La Jarnigoine Literacy Centre, undertook a study conducted jointly with the shelters for women who have been victims of violence, and with the centres in the Island of Montreal. They organized information sessions on illiteracy among women. About 150 women, including group leaders, residents, participants at the day centres, immigrants who have worked on literacy campaigns in their native countries and

literacy group leaders, participated in discussions on illiteracy among women.

Even though they followed one another, the two research projects were conducted in a completely independent fashion. Without consultation, the same subjects were tackled, similar observations were made, conclusions were drawn which confirm that the existence of a particular problem must be recognized and the necessity must be emphasized of offering women adequate resources, as is presently done for other groups such as youth, immigrants and ex-convicts.

Certainly, there are factors which women and men have in common: all types of illiteracy result from various forms of oppression caused by social relations which exclude and marginalize. For everyone it is linked to poverty, and it reduces people to silence. Illiterates are exploited, stifled by fear and shame. But there are differences: within social contexts, illiteracy is manifested and experienced differently.

A common vision

The two research projects had the objective of defining the characteristics of the female illiterates who attended community groups while establishing relationships between illiteracy and the traditional education of women, sexist experiences, sexual division of labour, access to employment and, more broadly, the traditional role of women in society.

Isolation and discrimination, which mark the socialization of women, play a determining role in the outward expressions of illiteracy and the way in which it is experienced. Indeed, many of the causes of illiteracy in women are directly related to the discriminatory attitudes and behaviours to which they have been subjected. The history of illiterate women, like that of women, is piecemeal, painful and characterized by discrimination from childhood on. Generally born into large families in which the mother takes care of the children and the home, the girls receive an education focused on their role within the family. They leave school if one parent becomes sick or if the mother is not up to her tasks; they abandon their studies in order to take on family responsibilities. The old mentality persists: boys are encouraged to study, girls are discouraged. At school, long and repeated absences frequently result in severe judgements regarding their capacity to learn. Finally,

discouraged or forced by family pressures, they leave school very early.

They have a very firmly determined social position and rapidly identify with the role imposed upon them. Family relationships and, by extension, social relationships gradually influence and delimit their environment. Although they develop many skills, their personal freedom still remains greatly reduced: they work alone and have little means of action. Many of them live or have lived in a state of dependence upon their spouses, which limits their autonomy even more.

The majority of them have desired, at one time or another in their lives, to have a job which is interesting, stable, well-paid and recognized socially. In the fields in which they apply for work, the hiring criteria are often unrelated to the tasks to be accomplished: they are arbitrary, unjust and generally based upon discrimination by race, age, sex and physical appearance.

According to statistics established by women's groups working on employment issues, those who take part in information sessions on the state of the labour market and hiring opportunities are between 30 and 50 and are generally on social assistance, are receiving unemployment insurance benefits, or are employed in temporary and part-time work. Twenty-five to 30% of them are returning to work after a prolonged absence due to family responsibilities. They turn to these services after repeated rebuffs, setbacks suffered in their efforts, or because stress and lack of confidence in themselves prevent them from taking written tests.

These women are little inclined to emphasize their experience, otherwise rarely accorded recognition. Because they are poorly educated, they find themselves in female labour ghettoes, concentrated in non-unionized jobs characterized by a fast pace, lack of benefits, and instability. Many take two jobs while remaining underpaid; others work strictly illegally. Many obstacles related to illiteracy and the insecurity arising from the non-recognition of their skills prevent them from gaining better paid jobs or from demanding better working conditions.

Discrimination, isolation, a social role lacking in recognition, repetitive tasks, a restricted personal space and economic dependence characterize the conditions of life for women, aggravate their situation as illiterates and help to create a particular profile. Conditioned at a very young age to occupy a peripheral position in

various cultural and social fields, they are seldom called upon to use the ordinary channels of communication and, consequently, to perfect their knowledge of the written code.

An itinerary of ideas and projects

Social projects have been launched to arouse awareness and to provoke change. Although conceived independently, they have the same goal: to combat illiteracy by improving the conditions of life for illiterate women. Based upon the will and determination of certain group leaders, they nevertheless remain marginal. Lack of time and of financial resources currently prevent the pooling of experiences which could lead to joint action within the scope of a general action strategy.

At CLÉ, a supplementary activity parallel to the literacy workshops has been created via a Women's Committee.

At the Atout-lire[4] and the La Jarnigoine centres, a functional practical workshop has been initiated for women.

At La Jarnigoine, literacy action tools have been produced, adapted to the needs of the group leaders of shelters and day centres on the Island of Montreal.

At La Gigogne[5], literacy workshops have been added to the usual activities of welcoming and sheltering women and children who have been victims of violence.

"Educating oneself to understand how to change one's situation, one's state of being a woman"[6]

The CLÉ research project had the goal of creating a place for exchange and reflection. The will of the women at the centre, both participants and group leaders, to gather together and to share their ideas was the determining factor. They decided to launch a feminist literacy process by creating a Women's Committee. Trials, periods of stress and periods of uncertainty have characterized the three years in which this collective experience has existed.

The participants are motivated to organize themselves by the desire to instill a sense of confidence and to strengthen the ties uniting them with other women, whether they be housewives, wives, mothers or employed. Together, they define the goals of the committee: to create a place for exchanges and reflection, for

expressing one's views, for support and solidarity, for organization and action to change their condition as illiterate women.

Conceived in the form of exploratory encounters, the initial activities of the committee served better to define the goals and to address the questions relating to the lives of the participants. The discussions inevitably led to reflections on illiterate women and by extension, on women in society. The meetings focused on topics chosen by the group: the 8th of March, the division of labour at the centre, menopause, interpersonal relations, fears and worries. Generators of complicity and new ideas, these exchanges of opinions, information and experience, both happy and sad, are always very stimulating. The interest of the women is obvious. The committee is composed of up to 18 participants.

The realities of illiterate women are recognized in the same way as those of women living in better known social situations. The women talk about their strengths, their weaknesses, their desires and their mistakes in a world dominated by men. The sum of these experiences which have been lived through is impressive but difficult to analyse. It is hard to define the realities, to find a common thread among them and to derive new knowledge from them.

Faced with the committee's feeling of impotence, the situation was examined and it was concluded that certain steps needed for developing a feminist process had been skipped. Nine women, group leaders and participants, studied the course of the encounters in order to redefine the operation of the Committee. An attempt was made to organize the more significant meetings by integrating the topics in a planned process. For example, beginning with "sexism, harassment and fear", the focus was placed on defining the reality of sexism and of harassment in daily life. Each participant expressed herself, recounting her own experiences and those which she witnessed. One gradually became aware of facts and their consequences. Emotions and reactions to these events were explored. Together, the members grasp the reality, name it, explain it in their own way, and this then constitutes new knowledge. The analysis develops, gradually the theoretical aspects of the question are underlined from each person's point of view. The matter is then illustrated more concretely by the staging of various situations involving ideas and emotions. On the basis of the facts, the means of taking action are explored; a way is found to make the realities visible and to transform them.

A new step is taken: the members talk about change, they look for ways to provoke it, to organize it, to make it possible. The commitment grows: the individual and the private becomes collective and political. The members organize together according to the goals to be attained and choose to act at the centre itself. A collective writing workshop is organized: the women address themselves to the men close to them. The text is published in the journal and in the agenda; it circulates, provokes reactions and stirs discussion.

In theory and in practice, the activity represents a feminist model of literacy. It enables women to become aware of their situation, to acquire a theoretical knowledge of their experience and to exert a real power in their lives, by making a change affecting both the female condition and literacy. It fits in with a literacy practice which takes into account the lives, socialization and attitudes of female illiterates.

Using the feminist ideology "the personal is political" as a starting point, the Committee of the CLÉ prefers the "consciousness-raising group" approach throughout its program, the cornerstone of the feminist movements. Instead of internalizing problems and developing a sense of guilt, the women learn to share their experiences, to go beyond individual responsibility, and to grasp the collective significance of the problems. For the women involved, this underlines the common character of the experiences and situates them in a society where the oppression of women is general and institutionalized. In establishing the link between the personal and the political, the women of CLÉ are better able to give their reality a name, to become more aware of their situation and to implement a change in improving the quality of their relations with the participants at the centre.

The Way of Women[7]

We have decided to write this text with the aim of sensitizing men to the situations which we regularly experience with them and which make us feel uncomfortable. For example, at the centre, we are often the object of disparaging remarks regarding our persons: "You're getting pretty fat, you're really silly, you always have the same hairstyle" and it goes as far as looks that undress us. There are also the stupid jokes about us women. At the centre, just like at home,

we often have to repeat the same things: "Men, pick up your dishes, wash your cups, help us to collect the ones that are left..." It's tiring always to have to repeat the same things and to feel responsible for the cleaning and decoration of the Centre. It is true that we learned young how to do domestic chores. "There were nine of us at home and it was the girls who did the housework." We quickly learned what it means to keep house and we would like it if the guys would learn as well. And it isn't just with regard to housework that they were raised differently. That's why they don't think the same way. We learned to get along, we did not learn to affirm ourselves and to take our place in society. We were taught not to talk back because it was not polite for a little girl. And even today we have trouble reacting when we end up in disagreeable situations, such as getting stuck with someone, being kissed, being called sweetheart when we're not interested.

We think that it is important to react because we don't like being bothered. We tell ourselves that there are ways of dealing with it. We can't make them understand by being stupid. Sometimes humour is the best way to get out of it. Other times, we decide to be deaf to disparaging remarks. Sometimes they don't realize they are hurting us, they should be told or else they will never know. We must have confidence in ourselves, we must respect ourselves. Basically, we're not the only ones to experience this, if we talk more to women, at the centre or elsewhere, we could stick together. What we want is to be equal, not to have to struggle all the time, not to be always on guard. We want to feel comfortable, to take our place without being told to shut up. We want men to listen to women and to stop thinking that they are only good for housework, washing, cleaning up and bed. At the centre, the women have decided to give themselves a place for discussing and reflecting together on the subjects that interest us. There we can express ourselves comfortably regarding things that we do not often have the opportunity to talk about: our rights, our fears, violence, harassment, our health... In these meetings, we find ways of taking our place in the centre more effectively, means of learning about ourselves. We can hear our own voices. In fact a Women's Committee is intended for the solidarity of women.

A Place of Learning that Measures up to the Expectations of Women

Workshops for and by women, and defined in the course of experimentation

The Atout-lire[8] staff wanted to facilitate access to education by opening a supplementary workshop during the day, after having discovered that the fear of having to travel the streets of the neighbourhood at night constituted an obstacle to literacy training for many women. Thanks to this initiative, women registered in the advanced group henceforth have the choice of working in a mixed or non-mixed workshop.

At La Jarnigoine, the functional illiterates group[9] has been composed solely of women for two years, although it was open to all. The women have created an atmosphere of confidence and have been able to gain recognition for themselves. Cooperative and united, thy have gradually learned to define the content of the workshop according to their life experiences, their values and their fields of interest.

In the two centres, what initially appeared to be a simple combination of circumstances has rapidly transformed itself into a common will to exert an assertion of power over reality. The participants want to create a place of learning which is suited to their wishes and meets their expectations. The idea, the very concept of these workshops is defined by experimentation.

Learning means communicating with others

In the workshops, the group leaders have gradually discovered the importance of defining the factors which will interact in the process of achieving literacy. What influences learning? What restricts or increases the chances of success? Can certain difficulties be resolved more easily by creating workshops especially designed for women?

For the latter, the decision to learn how to read often emerges from a situation of change and is directly related to an irreversible will to take control and achieve autonomy. Whatever the reasons - the death of the spouse, the breakup of the couple, the children entering school, the desire to enter the labour market - this decision gives rise to distressing awareness. It reveals, often brutally, that the

factors which caused the illiteracy and the extreme precariousness of living conditions - sexist teaching, sexual division of labour, lack of space, repetitive tasks, isolation, economic dependence and non-recognition of skills - are determined by the position which women occupy and by the role they play.

Their principal motivation, when it is a question of becoming literate, is often to break with their past. They must henceforth assert themselves, break certain habits, refuse to be constantly available, allot time to themselves and recreate their emotional freedom. In turn, these changes risk setting in motion reactions on the part of those close to them who, in many cases, do not accept the changes. External pressures intensify the women's doubts as to their ability to learn and often discourage them systematically. Gradually, the group leaders help these women to create a climate of confidence which enables them clearly to articulate their motivations and to use them as a source of stimulation.

If we wish to be able to draw from our experiences the resources to permit the acquisition of new knowledge, we must first of all recognize their worth. It is noticeable that illiterate women in particular have a very marked tendency to deny the value of the intellectual skills they have developed in their activities. At home, the lack of confidence is reinforced by the non-recognition of their participation in cultural and social life. They have internalized a negative image of themselves which strongly conditions their attitudes toward learning.

In the workshop, we try to discover with them the various forms of knowledge they have acquired, among other things, through the specific tasks such as planning and organization within the family, as well as the education of the children. We validate their role in interpersonal relations. Gradually, they gain more confidence and establish contact with an interior world which they wish to share. They go beyond the simple acquisition of a particular skill, the mastery of the written code, and express what they feel, what they think and what they experience.

Tools which meet their expectations in the learning situation

The educational experiences which follow illustrate well how the fact of taking into account the lives and attitudes of women in the practical work of teaching literacy influences the content as well as

the orientation of the workshops and determines both the place and the role of the participants in the choice of subjects and methods.

At the Atout-lire Centre, the thematic workshops are organized according to the concerns of the women in the groups as a whole. In these workshops, verbal expression by the participants play a very major role. The work sessions are set up on the basis of subjects chosen by the women. Initially related to reports of experiences with the personal circle, the discussion gradually shifts their focus to the condition of women and finally moves on to their relations within society. It is noticeable that the participation of immigrant women in the workshop leads to greater diversity of exchanges. The thematic workshops, designed in accordance with the needs, fields of interest and preoccupations of women, stimulates them to seek out information in other groups and subsequently to share it with members of the workshop. Reading and writing exercises are grafted onto various organized activities.

At La Jarnigoine, the women's workshop has participated in writing a guide intended to facilitate the work of sensitization and orientation of group leaders in the shelters and day centres. The illiterate women first learned about the project as a whole and then participated actively in it by writing a collective text. In this way, they emphasized their experience as participants in a literacy group and reinvested their learning in a socially-oriented activity. They are particularly proud of their participation.

This experience is based upon the oral expression of each participant and its success is owed in large part to the desire of each woman to express herself and to share her ideas. They talk in turn about role, they compose sentences which translate their thoughts. The interest given to the discussion and to communication with others enables them to establish a distance with regard to writing. They almost forget they are writing. The teaching of grammar and orthography does not intrude until the last stage of work.

Power in One's Own Hands[10]

> Once I was an illiterate who did not know how to count, or read, or write; it was very difficult for me; it made me think; I wasn't any stupider than anyone else; it was then that I decided to take courses.

I am very happy to be able to read and write; it gives me a purpose in my life and the courage to go on. It is not easy. It is a source of satisfaction to me. Now, knowing how to read and write better gives me confidence in myself to confront situations that I consider very embarrassing; for example, when my godson asks me to read him a story before he goes to sleep.

It is very important for me to see that I can solve my problems and can talk about a lot of things.

The need to know how to read and write is so that I can have a better job and a better salary.

I am very proud of myself.

Finally I am no longer afraid to write.

Louise Nadon
Évelyne Petit
Sylvie Sévigny

Literacy workshops in a women's shelter at La Gigogne[11]

The recruitment was done mainly at La Gigogne. The group leaders of the shelter were in a position to provide information on the literacy workshops and to bring the persons in charge of these workshops together with interested women. It is often the case that the latter have acquaintances or friends who are also illiterate. There is also collaboration with the CLSC (Local Centre of Community Services) and other community agencies which are in contact with people who could benefit from this service.

For two years, two literacy group leaders have run a workshop composed of functional and complete illiterates. The more advanced come to the assistance of those who are less advanced, the discussions have been enriched, and the life of the groups has become much more interesting. For the group leaders, the important point is to utilize capacities and affinities. Faster progress has been noted, especially among the complete illiterates.

Given that the activities take place over the course of one day, one can go into depth in developing a subject and finish in some degree that which has been started. Overall, learning takes place as part of a process of personal growth.

Once the needs have been defined and discussed with each of the people, the topics corresponding to individual needs and to subjects

of interest to the entire group are brought out. It is in fact the common denominator which must be found.

If there is a problem which concerns only one person, there is provision for a mechanism for individual assistance. The activities connected with the theme must encourage learning the grammatical and linguistic code, basic arithmetic, the metric system, oral expression, and reflection, and lead to new comprehension of the topic, a concrete application of learning in daily life and the adoption of new attitudes.

There are various blocs of activities during a day. The morning is devoted mainly to what may resemble group therapy, although all possible opportunities are taken for writing (personal diary), for reading (texts which add information) and expressing oneself.

When one talks about oneself, one's fears, one's questioning, one's wishes, one gets caught up in the activity. In this way, one improves the construction of one's sentences, corrects one's faults, learns new words, talks so as to be understood by the others, learns to have confidence in oneself, to comprehend the reality of others and to respect it. Obviously, not all are at the same level, a fact which enriches everyone.

In the afternoon, one period is devoted to practical work: how to write a cheque, address an envelope, read a pattern; another is devoted to arithmetic and to the metric system. Finally, there is one reserved for grammatical exercises in which each person can work at her own speed on her own difficulties.

Before leaving, each person evaluates her progress and discusses the tasks to be accomplished during the week: not only reading and writing work, but challenges to be met as well.

During the week, each person attempts to do things which she has never dared to do and the experience is shared with the others at the next meeting.

The session generally ends with a trip or an activity which is intended to enlarge the members' vision of the world, to open them up to other realities and to go a bit beyond what they have always known.

An Obvious Need: Cooperation

A woman who is a victim of violence can be blocked in her progress if she is illiterate.
An illiterate woman can have trouble learning if she is a victim of violence.

In the course of recent years, women have set up a network of service and pressure groups in which they fought in accordance with the priorities they have defined. In the autumn of 1986, the staff of La Jarnigoine decided to add a section to their popular education activities by developing a joint project with other women's groups in order to understand how, under the circumstances, to include the struggle against illiteracy in a broader action strategy to change the conditions of life for women.

This activity was intended to make it possible to understand the importance of illiteracy in situations in which it did not necessarily appear to be a grave or first-priority problem. The intent was to define its manifestations and consequences in order to sensitize group leaders of women's groups to the necessity of examining together the set of problems of illiterate women and to formulate with them demands concerning their situation "in a society in which knowledge is supposedly egalitarian and democratized". The intent was to enable women to gather together, to express what they were experiencing and to organize collectively. The intent was to create a network for screening, support and orientation.

For practical reasons, the La Jarnigoine staff initially decided to approach shelters and day centres: the type of activities offered by these bodies appeared to be suitable for the launching of literacy activities adapted to the procedure already undertaken by the group. A mobile group was established to determine what resources a popular literacy group could offer, taking into account both its means and the needs of the group leaders and participants of the shelters and day centres.

About thirty groups located on the Island of Montreal were contacted and the proposal was made to meet them, to present a video on illiteracy and to hold an information session. Designed in the form of thematic sections - illiteracy, a social fact; who are the illiterate? the special character of illiteracy in women; literacy resources - the information session proved to be a flexible and

effective tool of communication. In addressing both women who are victims of violence and illiterates, as well as group leaders, a permanent place of exchange was created which enables the former to reveal themselves and the latter to discover techniques of screening and the sources of documentation which they lacked at the time. The social and political realities which affect schooling and the process of becoming literate were examined. Together, the needs of illiterate women were defined in the process of autonomy undertaken at the centres they attend: signing a lease, looking for a job, making banking transactions, taking legal measures, registering for a course, in order to offer them adequate resources.

If the information session is well integrated into the operation of the day centres, and responds to the expectations of the participants, it has proved to be difficult to reconcile with the work done in the shelters which experience crisis situations and indescribable stress every day. The multiple problems of the women and the urgency of their situation consumes all the available energy.

Nevertheless, conscious of the problems caused by illiteracy and the insurmountable obstacles which paralyze the residents in their progress, the group leaders of the shelters have demonstrated a desire to be trained in order to be able to act on the spot and to diminish the shame, fear and impotence felt by these women. By joint agreement, therefore, the meetings have been suspended and tools intended to facilitate work with illiterate women are being developed together.

In the groups, a questionnaire is being tested which concerns primarily the obstacles which the women have to overcome when they take measures: what are the constraints and limits imposed by a lack of mastery of reading, writing and arithmetic? This questionnaire helps the shelter group leaders to address a subject which they often prefer to ignore. By determining clearly what obstacles illiterate women encounter, they are acting concretely and quickly.

We are waiting for a second version of the questionnaire before encouraging a larger number of group leaders to use it. At present it appears to be a valuable tool of sensitization and communication between participants and group leaders. It breaks through the isolation and encourages women to take their own measures.

Furthermore, in order to respond to the need for training expressed by the group leaders, a support document[12] has been produced which has been distributed to groups that may be interested

in this issue. The document is intended to sensitize shelter group leaders to the social character of illiteracy, to the difficulties of illiterate women and to the work accomplished by popular groups in order to facilitate screening.

Meetings are organized with the centres that have participated in the project, in order to discuss its repercussions and the possibility of collaboration. There is an exchange of information on practices, an attempt to clarify certain points of the theoretical research and an evaluation of the possibility of adding literacy workshops to the activities of shelters. This last point, moreover, frequently gives rise to controversy. The mobile team of La Jarnigoine has expressed certain reservations, both in practical and educational terms, regarding the usefulness and effectiveness of such a workshop.

It is interesting to compare the observations of La Jarnigoine with the testimony of the staff of La Gigogne, which has taken the initiative of establishing a workshop of this type. For the two staffs, the initial goal was the same: to act while taking into account both the violence and the illiteracy. The contexts are different and, it appears, determining factors in the conclusions which can be drawn.

The launching of workshops within the shelters, designed and run jointly with the group leaders for women who have been victims of violence, remains a feasible but long-term objective for the staff of La Jarnigoine. In the course of the project, the literacy group leaders learned that information and sensitization work must be done before the establishment of workshops outside the popular groups or educational institutions. It is thought to be preferable, for an initial period, to offer resources that require less organization, funding and energy, such as the production of a video on the subject of illiteracy and on violence, which would be distributed to all the women's centres.

The staff of La Jarnigoine is also pondering the educational aspect of its action. It distinguishes two types of action: short-term actions, which help women to take certain urgent steps, and workshops presuming a process of acquiring literacy stretched over several months, if not several years. The first possibility appears more realistic to them, however, and better adapted to the context of the shelters.

The staff of La Jarnigoine considers that learning to read, to write and to do arithmetic is a difficult task, sometimes even arduous, and can only be accomplished under certain conditions. In

order to concentrate, it is necessary to distance oneself from certain preoccupations, at least temporarily. Before undertaking such a step, one ought to take into account such factors as availability, safety and stability, which influence learning. For these reasons, it has been concluded that it would probably be preferable, for an initial period, to encourage popular literacy groups to run these workshops themselves rather than the shelters, which are not a suitable place.

We note that this hypothesis could not be verified in practice. It is at the limits of the project that the experience of La Gigogne adds its message in emphasizing the point of view of a shelter which, thanks to its consciousness-raising with regard to illiteracy, utilizes the links between violence and illiteracy and acts comprehensively to solve the problems of its residents.

Literacy Consciousness-Raising at La Gigogne [13]

Initially, La Gigogne wanted to have a house designed, organized and managed by women who were victims of violence, who came from a socially disadvantaged class, who would be supported in their action by several group leaders. It was at the request of women that a first group of functional illiterates was set up for the autumn of 1982.

These women were the heads of single parent families, poorly educated, economically poor and, for the most part, with experience of violence in one form or another. However, this portrait is not static; it has evolved over the years. Many of these women, still in most cases the heads of their families, have been trained, have returned to their studies and now occupy paid positions at La Gigogne or elsewhere. Their quality of life has greatly improved in general. Obviously, we are speaking here of the members of La Gigogne who have remained loyal for several years; for those who have joined the staff along the way it is almost always a matter of beginning again.

The depiction of literacy consciousness-raising also developed in La Gigogne. The first workshops did not make their appearance by chance. They were born of the will to take charge of La Gigogne by its members. In their steps toward autonomy, despite all the efforts made to take them in hand, the fact of not adequately mastering the written and spoken language closed many doors to these women.

How can one lead, teach others, make a radio or television broadcast, organize a press conference, deal with correspondence, gather information, form an opinion on subjects such as violence, abortion, nervous depression, etc.? And do all this when one's self-esteem is at its nadir.

Teaching reading and writing is done on the basis of tasks made necessary by the operation of a shelter which is just starting up. The importance of this project rests in the fact that it has been the source of motivation that has promoted learning, the ideal place for their reinvestment and the place where a more critical consciousness was born.

Two years later, given that the women did not know how to read or write, or only very little, when they came into contact with La Gigogne, a second group leader was added and it was possible to welcome complete illiterates.

Currently, workshops are offered every day to members of La Gigogne, but also to other women in Matane who live in the same situations. The needs change with the years and the groups. Or rather, it is the circumstances which change because the deep needs themselves remain the same.

A practice of consciousness-raising continues to be combined with the acquisition of literacy. What good are the tools of reading and writing if one does not at the same time acquire the means of utilizing them? Self-knowledge, understanding what is going on in one's environment and the capacity to exert an influence, the improvement of one's manner of entering into relations with others and of communicating, the development of one's personal potential, learning how to read, to write and to do arithmetic are the main concerns of La Gigogne.

Beginning from the lives of the women, from the point at which they are, is undoubtedly of paramount importance in the achievement of these goals. Depending on the participants, the topics may be more political or closer to day-to-day life, the lessons may lead to involvement in La Gigogne or in another agency, or simply in one's personal life.

In the light of two initiatives, those of La Gigogne and La Jarnigoine, it has been learned that the awareness and the will to change on the part of illiterate women has an influence not only on the choice of projects but especially on the determination to supply resources. For example, in Matane, the success of the workshops was

due in large part to the fact that they were set up at the request of the residents. In the same way, the La Jarnigoine project derives all its value from the fact that, owing to information and sensitization, it is intended to provoke just this awareness and that it is committed to supporting concretely the actions that can follow. Thus, what could be an additional concern and extra work for the group leaders of women's groups becomes a means of action all the more effective in that it makes it possible to work at the same time on various facets of the same problem and encourages collaboration on various issues relating to women.

A Constantly Evolving Work

This text and the experiences related in it can be compared to the formula "work in progress" used in the theatre. The reflections concerning illiterate women and the actions undertaken to date are part of a work in constant evolution. The practice and the theory develop simultaneously and nourish each other: the ideas trigger and justify the actions; the experiences call the theory into question and promote more thought.

If the group leaders working with illiterate women want to draw a more precise and more complete profile of the latter, it is essentially for the purpose of creating adequate resources and using the most effective means to counter the problem of illiteracy as a whole, in order to work more accurately to improve the conditions of life for women. As has already been mentioned, illiteracy is a serious social problem that affects both men and women and concerns the entire population. Men and women have common problems, which are as serious for one as for the other. The issue here is not to compare or to measure them, but fully to understand the differences, often brought about by the discrimination practised by society, in order to enlarge the range of our actions and increase our chances for success.

The picture of the situation of illiterate women may appear grim, but it is nevertheless true and faithful to the realities of the majority of those who currently attend popular groups. Conditioned very young by their education, they are strongly influenced by sexist stereotypes: they feel responsible both for organization within the family and for the quality of interpersonal relations. They are alone

in the face of realities that are difficult to grasp. If they know their situation well, the precariousness of their conditions of life block any prospect for change they may have within themselves.

In taking the step toward literacy, they break that isolation; in communicating with others, they gradually become aware of the reasons for their choices, for their desires and for their will to change. In many cases, it is the motives of the participants that determine the setting-up of activities designed for them. In participating actively, they learn to use these resources and gradually to appropriate them for themselves.

At CLÉ and at Atout-lire, it has been learned that women participate more in workshops and various activities designed for them. They can talk about their experiences and their preoccupations; they take their place and gradually open up to the outside.

At La Gigogne, one of the group leaders having set up a program of community organization at the CÉGEP, some of the participants now have a work certificate and others have enrolled in various programs after having completed their secondary 5 in continuing education.

As for the project of La Jarnigoine, it was lived like an adventure: no certainty and hypotheses reformulated many times. The only index: the experience of groups already working to combat oppression among women. The mobile team thus had the possibility of going to check the rightness of its action among the women who share their socio-economic preoccupations.

Taking into account the experiences described, we understand that illiteracy among women cannot be isolated from the set of their problems as a whole, and that studying it presumes the understanding of complex social relations, cogs in a giant mechanism. Whatever the spheres of action, whether one works on an individual or collective basis, actions and research concerning illiterate women must be in keeping with the social realities and connect with the preoccupations of the women's movement.

The experiences described serve as models, as reference points. Some of them could be retested in the development of new strategies, in order to determine clearly where to act, which aspect it is preferable to work on and in what way. They can be divided into two main categories: actions taken in the literacy centres, where activities are created solely for women, and social projects developed jointly with other groups.

In this way, a group could decide to set up a special activity during an election campaign to inform women as to what was particularly at stake for them. One could invite the candidates to discuss certain subjects, participate in public meetings or encounter groups of women involved in the campaign.

One could also facilitate women's access to community resources as a post-literacy activity - legal aid, tenants' associations, groups of people on social assistance, unemployment action, health centres for women, labour market re-entry programs - or promote their involvement in the community (parents' committees, women immigrant collectives, tenants' associations or citizens' committees).

One could also organize pressure groups to influence political decisions concerning the struggle of women against illiteracy and study the literacy campaigns and programs addressed to women which have been tested in other countries, for the purpose of better adapting ourselves to a reality which goes beyond our national frontiers.

Other groups could examine more closely certain laws concerning women in order to understand the consequences for their literacy training, for example the measures concerning day care, continuing education, social assistance or unemployment insurance.

The position given to the realities of illiterate women will be determined in large part by the energy devoted to developing the knowledge of the women's groups, pursuing the reflection begun in the popular education centres, enriching experiences, defining the new directions of research and making known and recognising the problem. This task cannot be accomplished except by the increased presence of women in public manifestations and their involvement in joint projects set up with prospects for collaboration.

Notes

1. These observations were made in CLÉ and La Jarnigoine literacy groups, located respectively in Mont-Royal plateau and the Villeray neighbourhood in Montreal.

2. Boucher, Andrée; Gladu, Nicole and Reid, Josée. L'école, ça me rentrait pas dans la tête. (I couldn't get school into my head). Reading and Writing Centre, 3684 Mentana, Montreal, H2L 3R3, (519) 527-9097, 1984.

3. Élise de Coster et Hélène Quellette, La Jarnigoine, 6815 St-Denis, Montréal, H2S 2S3 (514)273-6683.

4. Atout-lire, 325 Rue Ste-Thérèse, Québec, G1K 1M9, (418)524-9353.

5. La Gigogne at Matane.

6. Cf. Gladu, Nicole. 1988. *Une démarche féministe en alphabétisation* (A feminist approach to literacy work). Montréal: CLÉ.

7. Collective text written by Women's Committee, published in 1987 in the CLÉ journal.

8. The Atout-lire Women's Workshop was set up in 1984 and has been run by Francine Loignon for two years.

9. The group leader was Hélène Quellette.

10. Collective text by participants at la Jarnigoine.

11. Excerpts from a text by Allard, Lise. 1987. L'alphabétisation-conscientisation à La 'Gigogne' (Literacy consciousness-raising at la Gigogne). *Alpha Liaison* vol. 7, March.

12. *Le pouvoir entre les mains* (Power in one's hands) produced by the team of La Jarnigoine, Montréal, 1987.

13. Excerpt from Lise Allard, op.cit.

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THE ALPHA MONS-BORINAGE EXPERIENCE

Omer Arrijs
Alpha Mons-Borinage, Quaregnon, Belgium

1. The Situation

After 15 years of experience, we are still asking ourselves such simple yet weighty questions as, "What should be done? Why? How?" Very specific questions. We have experimented day after day, discovering how much the interests of communities, groups and individuals termed "illiterate" differ from those of the institutions which apply this label -and thus relegate them to society's fringe - and which draw up literacy training strategies in the name of a universal right to education and knowledge. Communication lies at the heart of our activity. But we have been unable to establish any real communication between society and those who society guarantees will remain "fully illiterate" or "functionally illiterate" simply by applying these terms to them. Contrary to the official line, does not society feed on illiteracy, which it produces to ensure that its unequal structures are perpetuated? Society needs both illiteracy and literacy training in its current, ineffective forms.

This is what a group of poor, illiterate participants in an adult education program in West Bengal wrote in a poem entitled "Why should we learn how to read?"

> ...But we must know
> Why we should learn how to read.
>
> We have taken literacy courses before,
> But we wised up after a while.
> We felt we were being tricked,
> So we quit.
>
> Do you know what we found out?
> Those bureaucratic stuffed shirts were turning this work
> To their own advantage.

Perhaps elections were coming up,
Or maybe there was a government grant,
Or something else that had to be used up.
What they taught us was useless.

Being able to sign your name means nothing.
Being able to read a few words means nothing.

We agreed to attend the courses,
If you taught us how not to be dependent on others.

...Can literacy help us live a little better?
To die of hunger less often?

...Will this program teach us
How to think and work together?
Will it include practical training?
If it does all this, we will all attend the literacy courses,
And it will be to learn how to live a better life...[1]

Of course, we must not over-simplify matters. We must acknowledge that literacy training has produced results both in industrialized societies and in the South. But we must reveal that these results have been slim and have not touched the root of the problem.

With a few changes, the questions which these common people of Bengal asked their instructors are also valid here in Belgium. Most of the "illiterate" set little store by our resources[2]. We have not communicated with them. We have not got below the surface. We have not really analysed all the issues, because, among other reasons, we have failed to put the "illiterate" themselves at the centre of the process and have not sufficiently analysed the relationship between literacy training and a wider process of liberation that affects the very way in which democracy operates and the way our societies develop. Literacy training has in many respects been only an excuse for continuing to do all the same old things. Literacy training remains a component of the marginal management of marginality.

An evaluation of our activities has prompted us to level these criticisms. Will we find solutions?

2. The Initial Period of Alpha Mons-Borinage

In Belgium's former coal-producing area of Mons-Borinage, the question of social exclusion is a burning one. The official unemployment rate of 26 per cent (36 per cent for women and 18 per cent for men as of June 1990) is the highest in Belgium.

The *Association Alpha* was created in Mons-Borinage in September 1976. At first, it organized courses in spoken and written French at several locations in Borinage for immigrant workers, including Moroccans, Algerians, Turks, Italians and Spaniards. We reached about 80 people a year. But there are approximately 47,000 immigrants in Borinage. And most of them have been here for 10, 20 or 30 years without any real language training having been organized previously. (For the reader's information, Belgian authorities halted immigration in 1974.) It was not surprising then that these courses were not wildly successful. Most immigrants had developed their own version of everyday French which satisfied them.

Recruiting participants involved a great deal of work visiting associations, neighbourhoods and the homes of possible trainees.

The declared objectives fell into three categories:

- utilitarian objectives: to provide people with the tools they need to survive in Belgium, so they can successfully handle procedures related to employment, housing, food, health, education, and so on;

- cultural objectives: to encourage immigrants to express their identities and personal histories in the face of Belgium's dominant culture; and

- political objectives: to develop a critical consciousness and a movement for social change, especially as concerned immigration, which our analyses indicated was a mechanism for perpetuating exploitation. A further goal was to create political projects in which the common people could express their vision of society and create their own history.

Liberation pedagogy

Literacy training claims to be a tool of liberation. It is a political act.

Literacy groups are both vehicles for learning language and venues for discussing, on the basis of everyday life, the key issues that concern immigrants: survival, immigrant identity, work, housing, education, the right to vote, and trade unionism. The issues widen toward an analysis of society itself. The speech of the immigrants is the starting point for everything. Learning a language means learning a specific way of expressing oneself, in the form of thoughts in tune with the realities one has experienced, about the representations of social relationships. Literacy training opens the door both to everyday processes and to sociology, law, economics, political analysis and the search for alternatives. Beyond the courses, literacy training puts people in contact with (or prolongs their contact with) other associations, other groupings, other struggles. It ties into a wider network of immigrant activity.

These options and this methodology are inspired by Paulo Freire, who said, "Knowledge cannot be transferred. It is created in and through actions that affect reality."[3] We believe that people liberate themselves, that developing the speech of all, even the oppressed, is the motor for social change. We refer to UNESCO, which declared in Persepolis in 1975 that:

> Literacy training, like education in general, is a political act. It is not neutral, because both exposing the social reality in order to transform it and hiding it in order to perpetuate it are political acts. Accordingly, there are economic, social, political and administrative structures that are favourable to the implementation of a literacy project, and others that stand in its way.

In our view, speaking, reading, writing and communicating involve expressing one's social situation as defined by exploitation and exclusion. All speech is the speech of a class or social group created by specific interests. The issue for the common people is liberation, not insertion. They achieve this liberation by affirming their identity, their right to a specific popular or immigrant culture. This liberation rejects conforming to the dominant standards. But this does not mean we think marginalization is a good thing. What we

are talking about here is critical integration. Language itself is not seen as a system of socially and politically neutral symbols. The popular codes are different from the dominant codes[4]. The main purpose of language is not to convey the messages it claims to convey. Its main purpose is to serve as a marker of social position[5]. Phonetics, grammar, vocabulary and the semantic system are always marked socially. They immediately tell others where we stand on the social ladder and where we are speaking from.

Language, as actually used in the here and now, is like an article of clothing, a sign of belonging that can be used to develop linguistic or non-linguistic strategies for establishing relationships with other groups. From this viewpoint, it is essential to promote the development of popular speech forms that express popular identities and at the same time develop speech forms that make it possible to communicate in the official languages.

Dynamic, liberating pedagogy for the common people is complex. It begins with the participants expressing their views of reality in their own terms (their speech, their writing and their re-reading of a text). We reject all scholastic approaches, textbooks, exercises and grammatical or linguistic formalism. The goal is to bring into being a specific system of symbols, meanings, relations and forms. A given utterance is spoken in relation to a concrete reality: the neighbourhood, immigrant history, school, the power which people seek, work, or the trade union.

This is used as a base for expanding, for enriching the linguistic resources used in the preceding stage. Using precise seriation techniques, we make the linguistic system operate in relation to what has been said and what forms have been produced (whether correct or incorrect). Enriching the forms permits and invites further expansion of the contents and meanings. A dialectic develops between work on the content and work on the form. Our literacy project tries to get below the surface to the bases of social change through language activity.

In the beginning, we worked almost exclusively with volunteer instructors, many of whom gave up when they realized the scope and difficulty of the task. "Literacy training" is more than just a few hours a week spent with immigrants who either do not know French or do not know it very well. It means investing in a complex pedagogical process that challenges the instructors and organizers themselves. Later, we had access to programs for getting the

unemployed back to work called Unemployment Reabsorption Plans. These programs are aimed at putting the unemployed to work for a limited time in socially useful projects. There are several formulas: Special Temporary Staff, Third Work Circuit, Unemployed Put to Work, Interdepartmental Budgetary Funds, Subsidized Contract Officers and Regional Labour Market Insertion Programs.

We had access first to the Special Temporary Staff program, then to the Third Work Circuit program and the Interdepartmental Budgetary Funds program. I will speak later about the precariousness of these types of job. At first, they were looked on as a golden opportunity, both for the literacy project - since it acquired a "more stable" work force (some people stayed with us for several years in this sort of arrangement) - and for the worker able to escape unemployment (even it not all the worker's rights are respected). Later on we shall analyze this situation, more radically, as a sham.

We organized instructor training on an on-going basis for the volunteers and for the Unemployment Reabsorption Program workers, who did not enjoy the usual statutory rights. Our purpose was to enable them fully to understand the issues, goals and methodology. This training had sociolinguistic, methodological and political components. We also took part in instructor training programs for associations other than our own.

Our methodology was written down in the form of pedagogical reference materials for instructors. These were neither recipes nor manuals, but simply methodological indicators[6].

The écoles de devoirs (Homework centres)

Shortly after launching the literacy courses for adult immigrants, we created "écoles de devoirs" with similar objectives at various locations in Borinage. In so doing, we tried to answer the call for a linkage between literacy training and *écoles de devoirs*, a call which Véronique Marissal made in *ALPHA 90* when she wrote: "It seems to us that *écoles de devoirs* and literacy centres could work together both in prevention and in promoting literacy among people who have little or no schooling."[7]

Six centres were set up serving approximately 100 children. Is this a lot? Is it a little? We think there should be a centre in every neighbourhood, but that would require an army of instructors.

The objectives of the *écoles de devoirs* must take into account scholastic constraints and the reality of scholastic failure. Children of low-income families (Belgian and especially immigrant) often fail at school because no one there recognizes their language and distinctive culture, and because the teaching methods, even when revised, are foreign to their lifestyle and view of life because they are based on the dominant lifestyle and standards. Schools select, perpetuating an unequal society. Those who are able to overcome the cultural barriers will occupy a respected, even dominant position, while the rest are pushed into vocational training (one "drops down" into vocational training) and can expect either manual jobs or social exclusion pure and simple. School thus reinforces cultural, social and economic discrimination.[8]

Combating scholastic failure is therefore a prime objective of the *écoles de devoirs*. Beginning with the school work and going back to the prerequisites, the goal is to help students understand the mechanisms of language or mathematics. As we struggle against scholastic failure, we try to develop means of expression that are specific to the children of low-income families and encourage an openness toward an analysis of society. But scholastic constraints are so strong that it is difficult and often impossible to detach oneself and step back far enough to introduce the analytical components that we would like.

3. **Initial Evaluation**

An initial appraisal of literacy training for adult immigrants and the *écoles de devoirs* prompted us to ask some basic questions about the effectiveness of our actions beyond the sincerely declared objectives. We could see some results.

Adult immigrants made progress in their acquisition of French, improved their ability to express themselves and even took part in defending their rights. In Hensies, for example, a group of Turks acted to defend their accommodation after they were threatened with expropriation.

Children did better in school, or failed less dramatically. But they were still being streamed into vocational training. And we found several of them a few years later in a training program we organized for young unemployed people.

A certain collective consciousness developed or strengthened around immigration in the neighbourhoods, families and networks of associations.

But, at the same time, we reached very few of the people who could potentially have benefited. We offered no real solution to the overall problems. Basically, nothing changed. In fact, it was clear that most of the people we wanted to reach had no interest whatsoever in what we were doing. Their lack of interest matched our lack of resources. What was the point of working with such a (relatively) small fraction of the population that was supposed to benefit? To put it bluntly, the "illiterate" did not want to be made literate. Literacy was our project, not theirs. And those we reached the least were precisely those who, in our view, should have been reached first: the most completely excluded of the illiterate. We were chasing a will-o'-the-wisp.

There is very little mobilization of resources around a project aimed at liberating others. The ideology of individual consumption is strong in society as a whole, and the common people are no exception. The mass media reach them much better than we can. How can we get our message across? Literacy training itself is more a product to be consumed than a mobilizing project. And raising the level of consciousness without the means to act and bring about change only produces a new and deeper apathy.

How can we communicate literacy training that is by definition based on a negative view of the people described as "illiterate", and therefore deficient culturally, socially, economically and politically? They are viewed in terms of their shortcomings, their lack of language ability, their lack of everything, whereas they do in fact have a culture, experience, thoughts and dreams, even if these are stunted, attacked and trampled on by a cultural and symbolic combination of forces that is not in their favour.

Yet dignity is possible. It must be able to emerge, but it lacks the means to do so. Literacy training is not what is needed. The starting point lies elsewhere and has not yet been formulated. Literacy training defines and underscores the very isolation it is intended to eliminate.

4. **The Second Period**

To cope better with these contradictions which our analyses highlighted, we adopted a new, more global approach. Literacy training became part of a more complex educational process based above all on the motive forces that make people tick and determine their behaviour and languages strategies, on the forces that can bring them out of their isolation, form them into groups and make them act. Once this is the goal, it does not matter where we begin, whether we start with literacy training, photography, the theatre, vocational training, dancing or cooking, so long as the teaching methods constantly expand upon possibilities that either already exist or are at least in the germination stage: possibilities of expression, analysis, understanding and action. The starting activity is a device for catching their attention, a conjuring act designed to make them see the issues. Diversity is desirable in that it creates a larger number of access points and thus responds to a range of expectations. So in addition to the literacy training and *écoles de devoirs* which we were administering, various other activities were also developed.

Multiple activities

Cultural expression activities

- *Théatre Alpha*, an action theatre, was initially set up by a literacy group and later expanded to include other participants. Two plays were discussed, mulled over, revised and performed by the group. The first, entitled "Dream of a Suitcase", tells a story many immigrants have experienced dealing with their never-realized dreams of returning to their home countries. The performances are an occasion for celebration and discussion. The entire production process is analysed, and the performances are a way of spreading discussion. The second play, entitled "The Beans of Hunger", analyses the loss of purchasing power and its consequences for low-income families. Its production and performance methodology parallels that of the first play.

- The multicultural *folk dance* group did not operate for very long. It was designed to juxtapose the various identities and encourage openness toward the various histories of immigrant groups.

- *Photo workshop* introduces participants to a method of expression centred on images, but in the framework of a critical approach to the relativity of our society's dominant image language.

- The multicultural *cuisine exchange* pursues an objective similar to that of the folk dance group.

Training activities (other than literacy training and the *écoles de devoirs*)

- A *sewing workshop* brings people together and has them exchange ideas. The workshop is aimed above all at Turkish women, who do not appear interested in any other activity. This is the means we have developed for establishing contact.

- Literacy *instructor training* ties into more general pedagogical training, centred on the key question of how to use these various activities to foster discussion capable of raising new issues and spawning new activities and projects that will help transform relationships within society.

  Theoretically attractive as this approach may be, it is very difficult to implement. Instructors very often experience a great deal of difficulty getting beyond the well-organized initial activity in order to identify paths of action that will allow their students to progress. People reach their limit very quickly. Yet instructor training remains a central component.

- The program for *helping people get a driver's licence* met a major need. Many people with low-income backgrounds have a great deal of difficulty passing the test, and the main difficulty involves language. Repeated failures have serious financial consequences. We helped almost everyone who turned to us get a licence.

  But an irony quickly appeared, in that people vanished as soon as they got their licence. They had got what they were looking for when they turned to us for help. Invitations to

continue learning with us were quite unsuccessful. So our goal of providing continuing education was perverted into offering no more than a one-off repair service. This led us to abandon the program.

- *Arabic, Turkish and Spanish courses* for both native speakers and Belgians are an occasion for multicultural contact. The courses are intended to remodel the speech of immigrants with reference to their mother tongues. Exchange and multiculturalism are possible only if we at the same time strengthen identities and restore positive status to cultures which, through immigration, have become backward and suspect. This is no exercise in nostalgia nor an attempt to restore cultures to the way immigrants knew them when they left their native lands. It is an attempt to encourage a specific discussion of current relationships between immigrants and native Belgians in the here and now. By studying their mother tongues, immigrants can develop a positive self-image. When Belgians learn and respect the language of another group and themselves experience culture shock during this intercultural linguistic exchange, foundations are laid for new social relationships that reflect this difference.

- *Vocational training* is aimed above all at young unemployed people who have failed at school or have dropped out altogether. It includes workshops on and courses in mechanics, electricity, video, photography, sewing, crafts, knitting, masonry, typing, bookkeeping and computer science. These technical courses and workshops are complemented by remedial French and mathematics and by courses in English, current events and law. The accent is on incorporating participants into society, but also on training them to analyse society and work for basic rights.

  This training responds to a clearly-defined expectation. It undeniably remotivates participants, brings their education up to standard and offers a second chance to unemployed people with a history of scholastic failure. But it offers practically no real prospect of a decent job. Although 33 per cent of the participants either find a job or go on to more in-depth training after their training with us, it has to be said that all the rest go back to being unemployed. And the jobs that participants do manage to find are generally unrewarding ones, such as temporary, part-

time or odd jobs. Enthusiasm thus gives way to discouragement and scepticism.

- *Socio-political training* sessions deal, among other things, with North-South relations. This type of activity has produced a twinning of our association with a pilot school in Nicaragua. In October 1987, we organized a North-South Week in conjunction with other organizations.

Activities of a social nature

- A *clothing exchange* recycles second-hand clothing, offering affordable clothing to low-income families. The exchange is always open and serves as a place for the poorest people to meet. The difficulty lies in getting people beyond the stage of simply selling things or helping one another socially to one of taking part in continuing education or training.

- Social and legal *consultation rooms* have been set up for immigrants; they also attract low-income Belgian families. They have given rise to a collective project involving "Fourth World" families called *popular economic workshops*. The purpose of these workshops is to bring together low-income families that have been excluded from society, so that they can together take charge of their future, rather than depending exclusively on the social services and public social assistance centres (CPAS)[9]. The popular workshops consist of various activities of an economic nature that the families themselves organize. These include gardening, wood recycling, preserves, meals, a furniture sales room, a second-hand goods bazaar, carpets, painting and clothing recycling. They are a place where participants learn about group living, project management, bookkeeping and written French. Weekly evaluations form a framework for on-the-job sociological training.

  But conflicts arise quickly. It is hard to develop solidarity among those who are most completely excluded from society. Many seek immediate, personal benefit before anything else. It is hard to keep activities going beyond the short term, and the group easily breaks up.

In addition, there are often conflicts between the paid staff and volunteers from Fourth World families because of differences in status and in the degree to which they are involved in the project. There are always questions as to who is in charge of the project.

Activities of an economic nature

- *The Alternative Bookshop* was a co-operative bookshop, but it did not last.

- A group of trainees and instructors from the unemployed youth training program set up an association called *R for Recovery* for recycling household wastes. It is currently independent of the Alpha program.

Participation in action networks

Our association takes part in various activities, such as an immigrant rights defence committee, Co-operation for Peace, efforts to protect socio-cultural workers (by campaigning against legislation that makes employment in our sector so precarious), networks aimed at combating poverty and activities that show solidarity with the Third World.

Insecure jobs

The second period was marked by a major increase in activity. Not all the activities were organized at the same time. Some had a shorter life span than others because of a lack of interest on the part of participants, or because we were unable to ensure continuity or attain our educational objectives. This increase in activity was possible because we successfully petitioned the Department of Employment for workers on a temporary basis. Because of this, our staff at the beginning of 1990 consisted of 22 people on Third Work Circuit contracts, four permanent employees, and one person hired under the Interdepartmental Budgetary Funds program[10].

This kind of employment status deserves a great deal of criticism. Several factors ensure its precariousness:

- The revolving door principle, by which the program puts an unemployed person to work for a while and then makes him unemployed again by giving the job to some other jobless person. The first unemployed person should theoretically have already found a job, but the job market is all but closed to people who have few qualifications and have been out of work for a long time.

- These programs are designed to reduce unemployment, and not to further the activities of associations. Because of this, the worker's qualifications (if he or she has any) are rarely those needed for the association's literacy program and other activities. And any training the associations provide ends as soon as the worker leaves the job, so it counts for little when the worker applies for other jobs.

- The rights of workers are restricted. For example, their seniority on the wage scale does not extend back beyond January 1, 1987. Any work they did previously is not counted[11].

- The unstable nature of the jobs means employees are often treated like second-class workers. And they seldom work in management-union partnerships.

In the beginning, both the association and the workers felt that, despite the precariousness of the jobs, they were better than nothing, better than being unemployed and better than being unable to carry out socially useful activities that met real needs. Everyone agrees the situation is not ideal, but everyone - the associations, workers, public authorities, unions and businesses - find some benefit in it.

This produces waste and reinforces an arrangement that exploits the associations, which need more permanent, trained staff; the workers, who go from unemployment to sub-standard jobs that only marginalize them even more and make it harder for them to hold on to jobs; employment policy, which becomes nothing more than an unemployment reduction policy; and social and cultural policy, which becomes subordinate to the foregoing.

5. Second Evaluation

Accomplishments

- The quantitative expansion and diversification of our activities enabled us to reach a larger number of people, up to 300 a year. Even if they were often irregular participants, many took part in our activities, which were linked to those of other associations. Our expansion was also geographical in that we acquired a stake in several new locations in the region.

  Of course, not everyone we reached became involved to the same degree. Imagine a set of concentric circles, beginning with consumers of the social and educational services and passing through various intermediate levels of participation to those individuals or groups who sustained the project and were concerned with its objectives. We tried to show everyone that literacy training is a collective project for social change using continuing education and based on the diversity of their realities. The responses, of course, were varied and complex.

- A popular methodology was designed and is now functioning. At first, it was based on literacy training, but was later expanded and adjusted to include other starting-points and activities. It aims not only at insertion into a specific experience, but also expression and analysis. It involves "applying speech" and "applying action" to the social reality that concerns us. The pedagogical approach is socio-linguistic and has been put down in writing (in part at least) in the form of pedagogical reference materials. It is applied in the association's instructor training program and in other associations as well.

- Obvious individual and collective progress has been made, both by "trainees" who stayed with us a few months and by "participants" who remained involved for longer periods and made up the nucleus of the project's "militants". Other progress, although more difficult to quantify, could be observed in improved linguistic, technical and professional abilities; a bringing up to standard of basic knowledge; better understanding of legal, sociological and socio-political matters; acquisition of reading and writing skills and French by immigrants and political refugees;

increased capacity for both verbal and non-verbal expression; greater self-confidence, a better self-image, greater independence and a greater sense of responsibility; development of an ability to analyse, discuss and act; improved project design and management; development of a critical consciousness of social mechanisms; collective action in the immediate environment and the region; and integration into other training programs and activities.

- About one in three recipients of "continuing vocational training" finds work or receives training at a level higher than what we offer. But most of the jobs lack security. Alpha's vocational training is intended above all for young people who have quit school and experienced failure. We can put them (back) on the road to socio-vocational integration, but major barriers still face those who are most excluded scholastically, since they are most often unable to find decent jobs once their training is over. We expect miracles from training programs, but the labour market is glutted!

- Fourth-World individuals and families have experienced solidarity, especially in the popular economic workshops. They have acquired management and organizational skills and have themselves organized a collective survival project that made them less dependent on social services. They have used this project to train themselves and analyse. But we have not got beyond the survival stage. The perspectives refused to widen beyond a given point.

- A great deal of work has been done training literacy instructors, social workers and educators in our region and in other parts of Belgium's French Community. This training of trainers is based on an analysis of language as a medium for expressing the relationships of power that confront one another in society. Training does not mean just teaching a neutral, formal system. Language is based on a system of speech, with which it has a dialectic relationship. The form is constantly being used in the light of political, social, economic, cultural and symbolic interests. If the popular linguistic codes are specific, then popular language teaching methods will also be specific.

- Alpha has promoted in public opinion a "brand image" that is contradictory and often challenged, but which raises basic questions about social exclusion, the universal right to knowledge, immigration, racism, multiculturalism, solidarity and our model of society. We constantly emphasize that literacy promotion, training, education and social action are political acts that influence the orientation of society as a whole.

Innumerable difficulties

The Alpha project has survived, but only in the face of great difficulties. The difficulties are so numerous that it often seems as if one has to be crazy to go on working in these conditions.

- The public authorities have often been very late in paying the subsidies. But it is quite impossible to finance ourselves. Our staff is large, but most are in substandard jobs of a temporary, insecure nature. What we really need is an activity that goes deep and extends beyond the short term. The jobs lack prestige, and this saps motivation. We have to hire staff who are for the most part poorly qualified, and this is incompatible with literacy training, which requires competence. We therefore experience a great many problems related to the quality of the training we provide.

  In June 1990, the Walloon Region replaced the the TCT, the Third Work Circuit system with a new one called the Regional Labour Market Insertion Programs (PRIME). This requires sponsoring organizations to shoulder a major share of the staff's wages. We cannot afford this cost. Because the new program perpetuates job insecurity, the association's workers refused to be transferred from the TCT program to the PRIME program.

  The result was that the number of posts dropped from 28 to 2. To continue operating, we have had to turn back to volunteers. We have had to restructure our activities and make more use of shoestring solutions than ever before.

- Our declared continuing education objectives run counter to the "mass culture" that defines instructors, organizers and the public. Our attempt to mobilize people for social change runs up against

the ideology and values of consumption. Has not the very idea of freedom become a product for consumption? In the face of an arrogant market and reinforced inequalities, exclusion affects great masses of people. We deal with this exclusion every day. The excluded are offered no real hope. For the moment, we operate like resistance fighters, calling on others to join the resistance. Many people are deeply discouraged.

- The current crisis and this worsening exclusion have placed greater demands on assistance organizations. Working in partnership with the people, providing continuing education, organizing training in social criticism, and getting at the causes of the problems we encounter tend to be put off in the rush to respond to more urgent matters. Continuing education, once seen as an education in critical analysis and in action for social change, has become nothing more than training aimed at integrating or simply inserting individuals into society.

  At Alpha Mons-Borinage, we realize that this need to provide emergency assistance prevents any real strategic reflection. We respond to those in greatest need. Must things continue this way?

- One considerable difficulty arises from the fact that it is hard to maintain an attitude of continual learning and redefining. After a period of research and progress, most people (and this applies to instructors as much to participants) quickly slip into an attitude of complacency because of the modest powers they have acquired.

To continue advancing, we must widen the perspectives and provide more motivation. But the necessary links are lacking.

- Our activities have greatly suffered from a lack of truly dynamic links with other sectors of society. We are sometimes criticized for working in a ghetto, for trying to do too much by ourselves, to the point where our project becomes partially unmanageable.

  It is difficult to find linkages that are truly open to the special characteristics of the excluded, to their history and their identity. Changes are needed in the practices and methods of many institutions, which, by operating in a highly bureaucratized

way, really do more to reinforce the mechanisms of exclusion than to correct them.

- Our activities reach hardly any of the six per cent of people in Belgium's French Community who live in poverty. Nor do we reach the "illiterate" people most marginalized in terms of the written language. The people we reach are those who already enjoy a certain amount of social mobility. We share these difficulties with many other associations. Without a specific communication strategy based on the specific interests and speech of the excluded, we will never make any progress. The approach cannot be merely technical. It must be cultural above all. Will we invest in this sort of cultural activity?

Is our appraisal of the second period completely black then? No. I have emphasized our accomplishments, which are undeniable. But we must also admit that in many areas we run up against a brick wall. But the story is not over.

6. **What Now?**

We are two appointed workers: one permanent and the other hired under the Interdepartmental Budgetary Funds program (FBI)[10]. Another ten or so people work as volunteers. We are in the process of restructuring our activities to reflect this manpower shortage and respond to the results of our more all-encompassing evaluation. How can we overcome the obstacles? What activities should have development priority? How can we, on the basis of these activities, act on a general level as well, on a level that addresses all the issues of literacy training and continuing education?

Two sectors remain at the moment: literacy training and the campaign against poverty.

Literacy training

Literacy training comprises three levels of activity:

i. Literacy courses

We continue to offer *literacy courses* to both immigrants and native Belgians. We are beginning to organize ourselves in order to expand within our region the network of courses, in co-operation with other associations and institutions, including schools, libraries, public social assistance centres[9], consultation centres for foster children, and the Youth Protection Committee.

In addition to courses organized in our own facilities, we want to see courses offered in other venues where communication has already been established with excluded individuals and groups, and could be expanded by introducing a literacy training approach based on teaching writing[12] and reading skills. We hope this will enable us to add new dimensions to our socio-linguistic teaching methods for encouraging the emergence of spoken and written speech and language that are most closely linked with an actual history, with effective social relationships. The immediate, strategic goal is to establish and construct communication, not to promote literacy. We must therefore establish communication in which the speech of the excluded is recognized as valid, to the point of becoming the core of the whole approach. Introducing into our teaching methods a simple style of questioning which nevertheless solicits complex responses, would open up new perspectives and no doubt unblock a number of apparently dead-end situations: Who says what? Where? When? To whom? How? Why? This new style of questioning does not negate the value of the specific action of literacy training, but may give it a new breadth[13]. It also presupposes that various actors in the struggle against exclusion will be able to agree on common strategies. That is the goal of action-training activity.

ii. Action-training

Action-training implies that the training process is aimed at setting up new strategies. It is organized at two levels: training instructors, organizers and liaison personnel for the struggle against cultural exclusion; and training literacy instructors.

Training instructors, organizers and liaison personnel for the struggle against cultural exclusion involves various social agents, including organizers, educators, librarians, trade unionists, infant-care nurses and parents. The goal is to establish a training process that is tied in with the activities of various kinds of agents involved in communication or non-communication with excluded populations, in such a way that their practices further the struggle against complete or functional illiteracy[14] as a factor in re-establishing communication. The literacy centre would thus cease to be the only place where people identified as completely or functionally illiterate would be sent (most of these people do not report to the centre anyway). Instead, the centre would interact with other agencies willing to revise their strategy for acting as agents of communication.

We are just at the beginning of this process. Other associations are trying to work in the same direction. The contacts we have made so far will enable us to offer an action-training program of this type beginning in September 1991.

The Organizer Training Service of the French Community Department[15] is also preparing a training project for the various categories of socio-cultural organizers that includes literacy training. We are associated with the preparatory work for this project. It will involve approximately fifty hours of training and is intended for actors in a position to spread such approaches throughout the territory of Belgium's French Community.

The literacy instructor training is designed to develop methodological abilities in a socio-linguistic perspective. The training tries to promote constant interaction between practice and theory through a chain of activities: initial description of practices → theoretical approaches → strategic and pedagogical pathways → experimentation → evaluation and analysis of practices → theoretical reinforcement → reinforcement of the strategies and teaching methods, and so on.

Our literacy instructor training includes: the initial and on-going training for our association's instructors, training we offer to other associations, training which other associations request from us, and participation as designers and/or instructors in training sessions co-ordinated by or with other agencies. Examples include:

- Training 16 literacy instructors in Namur province[16]. The training consisted of 150 hours of class time plus 60 hours of on-the-job training. Participants received certificates showing that they had passed or attended the courses. This training was important in that it gave participants a chance to develop real competence and gain recognition as literacy training professionals.

- Literacy instructor training in Hainaut province. A training program consisting of 220 hours (including 60 hours of on-the-job training) is being prepared and should start in October 1991.

- A 50-hour training course for literacy program personnel is being organized by the French Community Department's Organizer Training Service and should start in November 1991.

- An approximately 100-hour instructor training program (EAP) in a vocational training business[17]. The purpose of the program is to provide in-depth training in literacy promotion techniques and socio-linguistic methodology.

iii. Creation of the Mons-Borinage Committee for the Struggle against Illiteracy and Cultural Exclusion

This *committee* too has brought together various kinds of social agents to create pathways between the various levels of activity, although the main goal is to develop concerted strategies. The group, which has just begun to operate, is intended to play an active role in setting up local networks in the Mons-Borinage region.

We have begun a study involving teachers, librarians, parents and students that looks at ways of developing the pleasure of reading. We will use this study as a basic tool for discussing common strategies, especially with certain schools and libraries.

Without abandoning literacy courses (on the contrary, while expanding them), we have nevertheless chosen an orientation less centred on our association as the one and only agency combating illiteracy. We do not have the solution; society does. It is therefore essential that we create networks within society, while at the same time clarifying the significance of the actions to be undertaken. To do this, we need a concept of language and socio-linguistic teaching methods, plus active research into ways of integrating it into all

educational and organizational activities and the struggle against cultural and social exclusion.

The campaign against poverty

Activities include:

- popular economic workshops to promote survival through solidarity (see above),
- providing social and legal support to families in difficulty,
- basic training in writing, group living, typing, bookkeeping, and so on,
- a writing workshop,
- a street library for children (with a female worker reading with children in the streets),
- a sewing workshop,
- thematic sessions on social issues that concern low-income families and individuals,
- a network for co-operating with other organizations and associations, and
- studies conducted in local neighbourhoods.

We hope to co-ordinate the two kinds of activities: one of a more social nature aimed at combating poverty and expanding the field for literacy training, and one of a more cultural nature that offers precise tools for understanding, analysing, expressing and acting - tools that are necessary for acquiring independence, developing a sense of responsibility, communicating, and therefore for solving the social problems that face us. We constantly evaluate our activities in their various dimensions.

But this socio-cultural articulation is insufficient. It does not solve the problems of poverty. The duo of social action and continuing

education, however dynamic it may appear at first, very often only highlights the problems. Closed-circuit management of poverty is a definite factor in perpetuating exclusion. Poor people run into too many walls involving under-employment, health, accommodation, education, the police, income, administration, the myths of the consumer society, and so on.

At our level, we believe that co-ordination in networks is necessary not only for achieving global, in-depth action, but also for evaluating the appropriateness of the methods used. Is offering services to the poorest people likely to encourage them to become more independent? In extreme situations, it is often the only way of showing tangible solidarity, but it exacerbates dependence and does little to encourage people to undergo training. The relationship created by offering services and that created by offering education are different and necessarily contradictory. And when we offer services and education at the same time, the offering of more immediate interest generally wins out.

We want to go beyond simply managing poverty and impermanence, but such a step is beyond the capabilities of a single association.

7. Conclusion: Networks are Necessary but have yet to be Sufficiently Developed

The history of Alpha Mons-Borinage can be summed up as a series of efforts that have yielded results, but results that are limited and have sometimes led to dead ends. We have fought alongside many others for social change, not only in the realm of ideas, but also in reality, in people's everyday lives. But it seems as if many of them and of us live worse now than before and that our prospects are even more limited.

Overall, poverty has increased in our societies. There are 44 million poor people in Europe, approximately 20 per cent of socio-vocational positions are insecure, and many young people live as if part of a sacrificed generation. The aggravation of social problems is manifest in everyday life. Our actions in most cases do no more than help people better integrate themselves in a marginalized fringe that includes larger segments of society.

Many of us in the literacy, continuing education and social action associations wonder what meaning our actions have. Are we a kind of socio-cultural police force designed to impose order on the excluded? Are our services supposed to fill in the gaps of the social system? Are we factors for integrating people into society? Are we agents for social change? Many of us think fundamental social change is necessary if we are effectively to improve the everyday lives of the excluded, and especially if we are to bring them out of their exclusion. Teaching methods based on the liberation of speech systems that are today considered marginal and on developing a new dignity, cannot succeed unless we change the more general relationships in society.

Reorganizing associations into multidisciplinary networks that precisely co-ordinate, through the implementation of concerted strategies, the actions of teachers, literacy instructors, social workers, cultural workers, and so on, is definitely necessary if we are to discover a way out of the dead ends in which we currently find ourselves. But this alone is not enough. We cannot avoid a more complete socio-political re-evaluation. Otherwise we are only shifting the blame.

Public authorities have a well-defined responsibility for setting policies that effectively implement socio-educational priorities. Community associations can act in this regard as a social movement, exerting pressure, initiating debate and pushing for discussion of what priorities to adopt in the management of society as a whole. Should the market and gross national product have priority, with whatever is left over going to culture, education, social services and employment? Associations are starting to group together to address these political issues[18], to redefine themselves as a pole of activity within society, to think out political strategies and to build alliances.

But better resources and networks and new political priorities will produce no fundamental change if they are all designed and implemented *for* the excluded and not *by* them. The best-tailored and most indispensable resources will never do more than simply create the conditions in which the excluded themselves can gain access to expression. The excluded must be the principal actors in the drama of their liberation. Democracy is not just the right to vote, not just a body of lofty ideas, not just a component of the program for promoting the rights of the excluded. Democracy is communication through action. The point is not to integrate the excluded into

society but to recognize that they are social agents no less capable of speaking and orienting society than any other agents. Our main goal must be to introduce this final truth into our pedagogical and political strategies.

The excluded are not illiterate in the same way as, for example, a one-armed man is handicapped. They are rich in knowledge, experience and history. This should be the motor driving alternative teaching methods. But educators often set themselves up as controllers of accepted knowledge and ability. There are other, more creative approaches, but on the fringe. The role of the networks must be to expand these approaches and give them general application.

Teaching methods will come face to face with politics. Literacy training is currently only one of many factors that perpetuate inequalities, but it could transform its logical basis and become a voice of freedom for society, a factor that trains and educates not only the excluded, but all those who learn to communicate with the excluded. But by that time it will no doubt have ceased to be literacy training.

Notes

1. Cf. Lalita Ramdas. 1987. Alphabétisation et capacité d'agir: pour une définition de l'alphabétisation (Literacy and the ability to act: for a definition of literacy training). In *Point de mire sur la pratique* (Focus on practical training), an unpublished, international conference on literacy training in industrialized countries held in Toronto from October 13 to 15, 1987.

2. The literacy associations together reach only 3,000 or so of the 300,000 to 500,000 illiterate people who are thought to live in Belgium's French Community. And the people who are reached are rarely those most excluded from knowledge, such as the so-called "total" illiterates.

3. Freire, Paulo. 1987. *Pédagogie des opprimés* (Pedagogy of the oppressed). Paris: Maspéro; and Freire, Paulo. 1975. *L'éducation, pratique de la liberté* (Education: the practice of freedom). Paris: Cerf. See also Hautecoeur, Jean-Paul. 1987. Paulo Freire: politiques d'alphabétisation ou alphabétisation politique? (Paulo Freire: literacy training policies or political literacy training?). In *Introduction aux pratiques et politiques d'alphabétisation* (Introduction to the practices

and policies of literacy training). Montreal: University of Quebec in Montreal, pp. 295-325.

4. Bernstein, Basil. 1975. *Langage et classes sociales* (Language and social classes). Paris: Minuit.
Labov, William. 1976. *Sociolinguistique* (Sociolinguistics). Paris: Minuit.

5. Bourdieu, Pierre. 1979. *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (Distinction: a social criticism of judgment). Paris: Minuit; Bourdieu, Pierre. 1980. *Le sens pratique* (The practical sense). Paris: Minuit; and, especially, Bourdieu, Pierre. 1982. *Ce que parler veut dire: L'économie des échanges linguistiques* (What speaking means: the economy of linguistic exchanges). Paris: Fayard.

6. Publications of Alpha Mons-Borinage:

Situation sociale et enseignement linguistique (Social situation and linguistic training)
Fiches pour l'apprentissage du français (Resources for teaching French)
Évaluation (Evaluation)
L'apprentissage du français de base (aux travailleurs immigrés ne connaissant pas le français) (Teaching basic French to immigrant workers who do not know French)
École de devoirs. Pour une poignée d'idées en plus. (*Écoles de devoirs.* A few more ideas)
Calcul, mathématique. Initiation, mise à niveau. (Arithmetic and mathematics. Initiation and bringing up to standard)
Apprentissage oral - Apprentissage écrit (Oral learning - written learning)

7. Marissal, Véronique. 1990. The Role of Homework Schools in the Prevention of Illiteracy. In Hautecoeur, Jean-Paul. *Alpha 90 - Research in Literacy* (339-358). Montreal: Quebec Ministry of Education/Hamburg: Unesco Institute for Education.

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Bourdieu, Pierre et al. 1964. *Les héritiers* (The inheritors). Paris: Minuit.
Bourdieu, Pierre and Passeron, Jean-Claude. 1970. *La reproduction* (Reproduction). Paris: Minuit.

Snyders, G. 1976. *Ecole, classe et lutte de classe* (School, class and class struggle). Paris: PUF.

9. Public social assistance centres are funded by the communes and the Department of Social Affairs. They provide a regular monthly allowance or emergency social assistance to people without resources.

10. The main unemployment reabsorption programs available to associations are:

    a) The Unemployed Put to Work program, under which the unemployed remain unemployed but are put at the disposal of an association (or public body) for one year with a possibility of renewal. It was cancelled as a separate program in 1989 and incorporated into the Subsidized Contractual Officers program (see below).

    b) The Special Temporary Staff program, under which an unemployed person is given a work contract for a set period (often one year) and is paid the same basic wage as public servants at an equivalent level.

    c) The Third Work Circuit program, under which an unemployed person is given a contract for an undetermined period and is paid the same basic wage as public servants at an equivalent level. Seniority is recognized, but only as of January 1, 1987.

    d) Programs (b) and (c) have been cancelled in Wallonia and replaced by a new system called the Regional Labour Market Insertion Program. This program requires the hiring organizations to contribute a major share of the wages. Consequently, many associations have had to give up many of their positions. In addition, the minister responsible in Wallonia has cut a large number of Third Work Circuit positions: 4,000 out of 10,000.

    e) The Interdepartmental Budgetary Funds program, under which the unemployed person becomes a full-status employee. The Minister of Employment may agree with another minister, whose budget is insufficient to pay for the positions to which associations are entitled under the legislation governing their activities, to assume responsibility for funding these positions. However, these interdepartmental agreements are concluded for limited periods subject to renewal, and there is a ceiling on wage contributions. (The current ceiling is 590,000 Belgian francs, whereas the wage which the hiring organization must pay is at least 800,000 Belgian francs.)

11. Another discriminatory measure requires beneficiaries to work for two years in a substandard job before they can obtain a revision of their "unemployment code", the basis on which their unemployment benefits are calculated. Benefits during the first year of unemployment equal 55% of the beneficiary's previous wages and 35% from the second year, except for heads of households. Many participants in the Third Work Circuit program were paid 35% of their previous wages from the moment they were hired. "Normal" workers have to work six months before they can have their code revised and receive 55%.

12. More than simple technical ability, the goal is to provide access to "the act of writing", the act of signifying through the written word strategies for social positioning and for the creation of meanings. This is fundamental to our search for a pedagogy that promotes democracy through action.

13. The sociolinguistic approach we are suggesting is based on a theoretical framework that analyses the functions of language. Language represents the whole of human experience, of life in society. Action that affects human relationships is itself language. So our practices would benefit greatly from a better understanding of language's functions in relation to all the complex and contradictory interactions that characterize communication, non-communication (since we also speak in order not to communicate, to protect ourselves), desires, thoughts, the creation of meanings or the relativization of meaning, social positioning or marginalization, the imposition or challenging of authority, and the promotion or subtle destruction of independence.
There has been a great deal of research done on these subjects, including:
Jakobson, R. 1963. *Essais de linguistique générale* (Essays on general linguistics). Paris: Minuit, esp. Chapter 11: *Linguistique et poétique* (Linguistics and poetics).
Kristeva, J. 1981. *Le langage, cet inconnu* (Language: the great unknown). Paris: Seuil.
Schaff, A. 1969. *Langage et connaissance* (Language and knowledge). Paris: Anthropos.
Barthes, R. 1978. *Leçon* (Lesson). Paris: Seuil.
Sapir, E. 1967. *Anthropologie* (Anthropology). Paris: Minuit.
Bourdieu, P. (see Note 5)
B. Bernstein and W. Labov (see Note 4).

14. The distinction between complete illiteracy and functional illiteracy was explained by Jean Foucambert. Approximately 70% of the French-speaking population are functionally illiterate in that they cannot effectively read a text of intermediate difficulty. Complete illiteracy affects only the most excluded of the functionally illiterate.

15. Belgium has become a federal state comprised of three regions (Wallonia, Flanders and Brussels) and three communities (French, Flemish and German-speaking). Belgium's French Community is administered by an Executive composed of four ministers, one of whom has responsibility for continuing education and organizer training.

16. Training organized by the Higher Provincial Socio-Educational Training Institute (formerly the course for actively employed educators).

17. In keeping with the spirit that guided their creation, the vocational training businesses are both vocational training centres and small businesses. They are intended for people (preferably young people) who have no employment income and are therefore the responsibility of the public social assistance centres (see Note 9).

18. See, for example, the special edition of the magazine *Alternatives wallonnes: "Monde associatif: la cinquième roue? De la question sociale à la société en question"* (Walloon alternatives: The world of associations: the fifth wheel? From the social question to questioning society), March 15, 1991, No. 73-74.

ADULT EDUCATION: LITERACY FOR THE MASSES

José Luis Corzo
Julio Lancho
Madrid

Salamanca's Santiago Uno Boarding School

When children come to seek admission to Salamanca's Santiago Uno Boarding School, they do not usually hide their problems, since they all know that those with the most difficulties will have a better chance. It is easier for those who fail than for those who pass, easier for difficult students than for those who are easy to teach, for those without families than for those with families, for those unable to pay than for those who have the money to do so. Some of their initial profiles are truly alarming, especially their academic records. All are fourteen or older. Some have thus far completed only five or six years of schooling, or have repeated the sixth grade twice. They are very bad readers and hate school. They feel that they are failures. Some of their classmates have gone on to finish high school, whereas vocational training is their last chance. They have been hooked by the idea that, instead of studying, what they should do is learn a trade. "He likes working outdoors, you know," say their mothers or the adults who bring them, "but he has no interest in books. You see, he doesn't like to study. Not everyone has the same bent. Now take his eight-year-old sister. Every day she has her nose buried in her schoolbooks and notes. But the boy is happy when he's driving a tractor or tending the cows with his father, whatever you want him to do along those lines."

The teacher who welcomes the new student knows in his bones what a challenge he is taking on. Without his realizing it, the boy must be made to become accustomed to a school routine *on a full-time basis* (Saturdays and Sundays included, except for one day a month). Every day during school hours, he will go to Lorenzo Milani Agricultural School, where he may enter a special remedial course until he catches up with the rest; at the boarding school, in his free time, he will be tutored daily by another student who has

volunteered for this purpose, and he will take part in many weekly group activities. Above all, he will read the newspaper. Reading the newspaper is the miraculous tool by which a boy whose teachers have given up on him will be turned into an active student.

Every night after dinner, at 10:15 p.m., the whole boarding school gathers to read the newspaper. The headmaster leafs through it, sitting in a circle with all of the junior and senior students, teachers and kitchen staff, as well as Consuelo, the housekeeper. They are all ears, eager to find out what is happening in the world. They are not naturally interested and attentive when they get here; you have to keep working on them day after day. (How could teachers who maintain that the interests of youngsters must always be used as a starting point manage with students like this?) To whet their appetites, we recommend starting with what is most difficult for the boys and least familiar to them (not soccer). We must also ask ourselves who would benefit from keeping these youngsters ignorant, and why they would want to distract them and keep them out of the mainstream.

The headmaster reads a headline and begins asking questions to ensure that the students have understood. What does this word mean? Where is this country? ("Point to it on the map, Johnny.") Is it rich or poor? Who is its leader? What led up to this event? What is happening? What are its consequences? Does it affect us? Can we shrug it off? The main thing is to promote solidarity. Instead of dividing the world into Spaniards and foreigners, those near or far away, we divide it into those who take action and those who are left out; we feel close to the victims of every event in each place. We delve into each news item until students see that it affects us or others like us, even if they are far away, and we connect it as much as possible with what students already know. We never ask anyone what he does not know; rather, we ask each student what we know he can answer, no matter how simple some of his answers may be. Giving an answer makes a student more self-confident and raises his esteem in the eyes of the rest, even if he only names the king or his son. Answering questions about the newspaper has given many boys at Santiago Uno their first taste of academic success, their first and only intellectual satisfaction. They may have learned what they know outside school, probably on television. What better opportunity to make connections with real life on the streets?

Once this exercise has begun, its possibilities multiply a thousandfold. One has only to see this in the older boys. "Ask the history teacher." If the question is about economics, "Ask the maths teacher." "Ask your grandfather and see if he remembers." It is useful for students to make a note of the new words they learn each day and a few of the most interesting events; they will use this later as a diary and a reference.

This daily practice, which lasts twenty to thirty minutes, lays the foundation for many things. It arouses an undying interest in whatever happens to the world's poor. Broader and more serious subjects can be discussed with the older boys. Above all, this daily exercise arouses their suspicion and shows them that not everything printed in the newspapers is true, making them very aware of the news industry (owners, agencies, advertising, pressures and so on). This is essential in today's world to safeguard the freedom which you lose if you are misinformed.

Long-range developments can then be followed over a whole quarter. News items can be carefully analyzed to see their inner workings as well as their snares, and we can write them ourselves, using the rules that journalists follow, so that we never forget what experience has taught us. We can even put together a school newspaper in eight hours, such as Santiago Uno's independent newspaper, *La Bronca* [The Uproar], which comes out from time to time. Above all, students become informed and critical citizens who participate and seek the truth.

Roots in the School of Barbiana (Lorenzo Milani, 1923-1967)

This Spanish experiment in adult education and literacy, in the broadest sense of the word, stems from, and is modelled on, the work of Lorenzo Milani, an Italian whose students lived in the hills of Florence's tiny parish of Barbiana. In 1967, they wrote *Letter to a Schoolmistress*, which was translated into Spanish in 1970 and had a significant impact on the experiments that we are describing.

Letter to a Schoolmistress summarized and was the culmination of Milani's contribution. He died a few weeks later at the age of 44, a victim of his illness. But the *Letter* was not his only achievement, and we must explain his work as a whole to gain a better understanding of our own educational experiment in Spain.

Milani was twice a convert. First, when he was already twenty years old, at the height of the Second World War, he converted to Catholicism from his family's agnosticism (his mother was a non-practising Jew). Second, and at almost the same time, he was converted to solidarity with the poor and underprivileged social classes, whereas his family had been well-to-do and culturally sophisticated.

The first conversion landed him in the parish of Calenzano, on the industrial outskirts of Florence, immediately after the Second World War, when the people were emerging from hunger, the backward rural conditions of many areas, and the defeat of fascism, and turning toward industry, progress and freedom. The young assistant parish priest, who had recently embraced the gospel of Christ, found his fellow parishioners to be a brick wall of prejudice and conditioning created by propaganda and custom, without any ability to reason and therefore incapable of resisting. Milani felt that it was impossible for the life-giving Word of his faith to have the slightest effect on minds hampered by a poor mastery of language, since words were the only vehicle for the Word made flesh. He then decided to devote his priestly work to education, mainly for young people who are the fodder for all propaganda, including ecclesiastical propaganda of the worst kind. Apart from his theological intuition that saw faith in the Word of God as impossible unless it can be heard in the only medium in which it can be spoken, which is the world around us, Milani understood that each person must freely name reality from within himself. That is what being an adult means: not learning what others have said, but calling things by their true names. In this inner echo, which uses the words of everyday speech to call each reality by its rightful name, and not the name dictated by others, people hear the call of reality that is meant for them alone. This call and response, this mutual encounter in which reality is illuminated by its true name and every individual's inner being is summoned to the cause of reality, is humanity's most noble experience. (For believers, it is also an encounter with God.)

Although Milani and Paulo Freire did not know one another, an admirable kinship exists between them. Milani's second conversion to the poor inspired the second part (also akin to Freire) of his intuition as an educator that the poor are closer to reality. To colonize them, to teach them our words for things, is to do them

violence and thus destroy any likelihood of a truly liberated and liberating culture. Milani exhaustively analyzed the colonization of the poor by the dominant bourgeois culture. Amid the euphoria of world peace, he intuitively perceived all of the dangers that have now become a reality: the mass media's invasion of the fabric of society, creating popular culture and information usually biased in favour of capitalist interests, the destruction of class consciousness that this entails, and the shunting aside of the exploited into regions of the Third World that are less visible from here.

Milani devoted a book - the only one he ever wrote under his own name[1] - to a study of the Church and whether or not it had been an accomplice in the domination of the poor through education or the lack of it. Despite the long foreword by an archbishop and the *nihil obstat* of the Cardinal of Florence, the book was withdrawn from bookstores as untimely.

There were to be two other major clashes with the civil institutions of this free and democratic world: with the courts and, even more, with the legislative authorities to which justices inevitably defer; and with compulsory education. The first clash occurred because Milani defended conscientious objection to military service, and thus also trampled on the army and the concept of the nation as the protector of individual interests. In line with this thinking, however, Milani made it very clear that conscientious objection is the habitual state of modern citizens, and not only where the military is concerned.

In his most famous document, *Letter to a Schoolmistress*, this time signed by his young students in the hills of Florence, Milani opposed compulsory education as a truly selective and taming institution. Yet Milani saw this institution as the last hope of awakening awareness and clear thinking.

In Spain, this experiment - whose protagonist (he was so fond of each individual being his own protagonist!) said that *loyalty to the dead is the greatest disloyalty* - produced the Milanian Educators' Movement (MEM), part of the trend toward educational reform in recent years, which sees education as taking a stand against domination and thus reacting to rather than conforming to the modern world.

This movement's educational techniques boil down to becoming aware of reality in terms of the interests of the poorest of the poor. At the same time, this movement involves mastering language, a feat

no less historic than the storming of the Bastille, although it is a quieter, more tenacious battle that is much harder to win. The final step is action, the individual and collective attitude that stems from taking a conscious stand.

Everything we have said above explains, if only to a slight degree, why people are tremendously unaware of, or fear the stigma of, Milani's message. This is because Milani left those who have continued his efforts on the slippery and unfavourable slope of a paradox. This yes-and-no situation - which means developing educational theory solely on the basis of practices to which one is committed; radically opposing all types of institutions, from the Church to the courts or legislative authorities, from schools to the mass media, showing absolute respect for the orthodoxy of each of these institutions; opposing the dominant culture while claiming its achievements for the oppressed - is shocking and uncomfortable in our world of those who either aspire to become part of the Establishment or who, having done so, rebel against it.

Of all possible paradoxes, however, the one that professional educators find most unsettling is, once again, Milani's ambivalence toward his own methods. He developed magnificent teaching methods, which would in themselves have made a significant contribution to our educational heritage, except that he saw them as being of secondary importance:

> Friends often ask me how I manage to keep the school open and full. They insist that I write down a method, that I spell out curricula, subjects and educational techniques. They are asking the wrong question. They should not be concerned about *how to teach*, but about *how to be teachers*.[2]

This pronouncement, as well as the other statement quoted above about disloyalty to the dead, render virtually impossible the servile imitation that has been the curse of famous educators, both living and dead, with Freire and Freinet heading the list. In many cases, their methods have been adopted but not their underlying intentions, thus watering down their message. This is relevant because each of the experiments being carried out at the Santiago Uno Boarding School and at Lorenzo Milani Agricultural School, both in Salamanca and at other schools and centres for adults in Spain's suburban and rural areas, is unique, irreproducible and intentionally heteroge-

neous. The same can be said of the methods applied there: reading the newspaper, collective writing, visits and field trips.

The common thread in all of these experiments is not so much *how to do things* as *how to be*. That is why we do not distinguish between doing and being in the description of educational strategies which follows.

Literacy and Education through Reading the Newspaper

First, let us agree on the meaning of "education". For the students of Barbiana, *true education, which no one has ever possessed, consists of two things: being of the people and mastering language.*[3] According to this definition, everyone should be regarded as uneducated, and the vast majority of people as illiterate. The reader should be careful to note that we are not talking about education in the conventional sense. Taking this argument to its extreme conclusion, we might infer that this vast majority of *illiterates* would be found at opposite ends of the spectrum: the masses and the educated people (?), farthest removed from the concerns of the majority.

However, not all *illiterates* and not all *uneducated people* are alike. Some are unaware of the forces that motivate most of their fellow human beings; they have the good fortune of possessing the dominant culture. Others belong to a world traditionally more inclined to co-operation; they are unfamiliar with the keys and mechanisms of the dominant culture.

For some, the logical process of *enculturation* and *literacy* occurs by acknowledging and practising such unfashionable values as solidarity; for others, it occurs by learning the passwords of official culture - mastering language - without abandoning one's own cultural milieu. In school, however, the latter is the problem.

The process of literacy (in the broad sense in which we are using the word) thus cannot be a one-way street - with culture being bestowed and received - but implies give and take: both teachers and students exchange their respective cultural models to produce a new reality. The fact is that this process of literacy never occurs on a level playing field, which means that there are serious difficulties in applying theory to practice. What thus occurs in many cases is a

patchwork literacy, a cultural invasion that Freire described as banking education.

This is often true despite the good will of educators, who are more often concerned about methodologies than the meaning of their task. Let us examine one of the methodologies that we have examined in detail: the educational use of newspapers. This is one of the strategies most susceptible to the bankers' approach. As soon as a group of adults get their hands on a newspaper, they take for granted its wonderful benefits, its supposed ability to result in the liberating education that books describe so well.

This superficial view of the matter is fundamentally based on two very widespread myths regarding the use of newspapers that must be debunked. The first is that newspapers bring real life into the classroom. This well-intentioned and very widespread statement is potentially fraught with danger, since it gives rise to attitudes of complacency. It would thus be sufficient to introduce the use of newspapers in schools to establish a very close connection between the classroom and real life; we could then talk about adult education serving those for whom it was intended, and modern educators distancing themselves from outmoded styles of teaching. However, things are not that simple. This approach is simply a cliché for public consumption. Newspapers are not real life. Moreover, newspapers bring biased views of life into the classroom, which is cause for alarm. This should not lead us to conclude that their use is thus inadvisable, since books also present biased and unquestioned views of life, and text books - even mathematical texts - are no exception, for the existing educational system and all foreseeable systems present a biased view of the world.

The advantage of newspapers in this regard lies in the fact that their biases are more obvious to informed readers. Newspapers also focus on specific situations and do not claim to have all the answers. This makes it possible to demystify the printed word and thus the guarantee of infallibility that written culture (*"what books say"*) enjoys in the eyes of the man in the street. Seen in this light, newspapers can be used, not so much to bring real life into the classroom, as to ensure that students think above all.

The second myth is that using newspapers is liberating. This statement, like the one above, confuses the end with the means. Simply using newspapers in adult classrooms without carefully thinking about the role that newspapers play is merely stultifying.

It would be rather like transmitting the same old values, those of traditional schools, only more effectively. That would be like running to stay in the same place. It is not the means that liberates. It is not sufficient to change educational techniques. Using newspapers would be liberating only if its ends were liberating and clear to those taking part in the educational process.

But now that we have debunked these myths and know the enormous potential of newspapers for influencing opinion, what approach do we take when faced with a group of boys from a rural area or a group of adults from a suburban community?

The paradoxical approach, of course. Newspapers must be used precisely because they are biased and slanted like everything else. They must be carefully analyzed precisely because they express the world view of those in power. They must be translated precisely because they use a secret jargon accessible only to those who have mastered the code. Their true nature must be exposed precisely because, when used in a naive manner, they may entail a cultural invasion and a travesty of *literacy*.

All of these things must be done precisely with people who belong to the vast majority of the dispossessed, those for whom newspapers are not written, those mentioned only sporadically and in a negative light as "the masses". This must be done precisely with the intention of making people *literate*, that is, enabling them to gain a better understanding of the world. We must also bear in mind that newspapers are a distant reality for these people, and we must ask ourselves why.

The answer to this question is of fundamental importance in addressing this task. It seems clear that a vast majority of Spaniards lack the specific tools required to read newspapers. They lack not only the mastery of their secret jargon but also the linguistic tools and the level of culture necessary for an adequate understanding of the mechanisms that govern the complex world we live in. Furthermore, undoubtedly as a result of the woeful legacy of the previous régime, we Spaniards lack a sense of community, that is to say, of political life. Spanish society continues to be without a backbone; very few people join organizations of any kind. Thus, the life described in newspapers, which revolves around the community, does not interest the majority of people in the slightest, since they do not understand what they are being told. As a result of their

historical legacy and the current passion for privacy, the people seem to have been pushed into choosing the path of fierce individualism.

Are newspapers an appropriate vehicle for literacy, then? Without a shadow of a doubt. They might even be called an ideal and essential vehicle, where institutional and human failings cross paths and come face to face. However, this is not obvious at first glance. That is why we must use newspapers, analyze them carefully, translate them and expose their true nature, thus blending into a single process both learning and an understanding of what reality means to each individual.

In practical terms, this means avoiding the easy and immediate tendency to make the content of newspapers *educational*, that is, to turn them into useful aids for language or mathematical games, as we used to do with compositions about what we did on our summer holidays. This practice, which characterizes the banking approach as we have indicated above, is misleading and isolating.

Opposing the Culture of the Owners of Information

If we wish to avoid misleading and isolating students and turning them into mere clippers of newspaper articles, they must first know who is who in Spain's media industry. This knowledge is not always easy to obtain, but it is essential if students are to begin reading their output with a minimum of safeguards. We must find out who controls information, the economic, financial, ideological and political groups that pull the strings of the national news. Basically, we must review:

- the major national and/or regional newspapers;
- press associations;
- news agencies;
- advertising agencies and advertisers.

We must pay attention to changes in ownership, capital investments and the invasion of Spain's communications market by large multinational groups. All of these changes are currently taking place at an accelerated pace and are significantly altering the information scene in our country. The information given in the mastheads of our newspapers rapidly becomes outdated and may be misleading.

This difficult job is absolutely necessary, however, since it is a complicated matter to decode messages without knowing where they are coming from. Performing this task also teaches us to see the apparent pluralism of information in its true light; every day, this pluralism is increasingly jeopardized by the inexorable trend toward concentrating many media in few hands.

Next, it is necessary to analyze how newspapers are organized: their corporate structure, their technological development and, most importantly, their sources of financing. This special emphasis on financing sheds new light on another type of influence on the output of information that the reader ultimately receives. Figuring out how much revenue a publishing company derives from newsstands and advertising is a necessary and enlightening exercise.

After studying how publishing companies are organized, we must formally analyze *newspapers as objects in themselves*. Here we begin the task of decoding, since not all newspaper readers are aware that the way in which information is presented is already a manipulation of that information. It thus seems important to spend some time analyzing how space, sections and supplements are laid out, as well as the priority among them and the criteria for establishing this priority.

In descending order, we then come to a study of how news items are structured. Knowing how news items are put together subsequently makes it much easier to work with them and also provides an opportunity to begin learning about the different types of journalism.

Only then can we begin decoding the content of news items and the linguistic codes in which they are written, and *translating* newspaper talk - another *cultured* idiom - into popular terms that ensure that the reader will fully understand the messages that news items convey. This is done in a variety of ways depending on the context and the group that undertakes this task. We may read the news in a group as described above, trying to grasp day-to-day reality. We may make an in-depth analysis of the news that is of greatest interest to the group each day, taking it apart and putting it back together from the perspective of those who will never write for a newspaper. We may monitor a specific current event over a period of time, usually three months, to gain a full grasp of the issue studied and the circumstances that surround and shape it.

Other approaches may be equally valid, as long as newspapers are used, analyzed, translated and seen for what they are.

In connection with this task, groups of students may develop newspapers such as *La Bronca* at Salamanca's Santiago Uno or *El Loro* [The Parrot] at the Alcorcón Centre for Adults in Madrid. They must be newspapers, however, and not literary magazines as is common practice at the vast majority of educational centres. They must be fast-paced, put together in a period equivalent to that of daily newspapers. They must be informative, containing news of interest to the communities in which they are based. They must be self-sufficient, financed by the means usually available to newspapers, such as advertising and sales. All of this must be done with two purposes in mind: to discover *from an insider's perspective* the determining forces, the conflict of interests, the pressures and the limitations of the news profession, which is so frequently idealized by the illiterate; and to serve as a means of expression, however modest, for those who never have a say.

In any use of newspapers in the classroom, it is essential to rewrite the news. Passive acceptance of the press is the reader's greatest pitfall; to overcome this, it is not enough, as some maintain, to allow readers the occasional, limited opportunity to have their own say. It is not enough to produce school newspapers, no matter how well. Doing so teaches students the tricks of the trade, its limitations and dependencies, and this knowledge is very valuable when they pick up a real newspaper. However, it may produce habits of general scepticism and indifference so great as to be impervious to any news, and that is not good, either.

Bertrand Russell said that *schools should teach children the art of reading newspapers with disbelief*. That is something entirely different. Unlike scepticism, disbelief is active and involves becoming an active interpreter rather than passively and bitterly cutting oneself off.

Interpreting does not always mean being right, much less grasping, the truth by and for ourselves alone. Nor does it involve becoming know-alls, but rather restless searchers for relative truth. Relative does not mean absolute, of course, but that is not what matters. We mean *relative to the masses*, from whose vantage point we have already said that we read: the truth of a matter that affects us.

Let us look at an example. After following the same news story for several weeks (what we call monitoring), or after carefully analyzing a single news item, the group must develop its own written version, giving the background of the event to provide a proper framework for more recent developments and then asking the questions of traditional journalism, the five W's (who, what, when, where and why), as well as how. To this we add how events are interrelated, the background in question and the consequences. When the news is read from the viewpoint of the poorest of the poor, those who pay the price of history, everything is turned topsy-turvy. The protagonist of the news story (who) may not turn out to be the mandarin but rather the victim. When ceases to be an immediate date and becomes the exact number of years spent waiting for greater justice or for a demand to be met.

This is an amusing and exciting exercise that allows room for future consequences. It is also a bitter pill for teachers who believe that schools should be neutral, or that they should keep their own opinions to themselves. Many adults believe it is their duty to avoid controversial issues that would disrupt the school's tranquillity. On the contrary, such controversies represent a golden opportunity to practise true democracy, for teachers to become the absolute guarantors of the freedom to express all of the opinions - including their own - of those who are present and those who are absent and hence unable to speak for themselves. Dissidents deserve to be paid attention, especially if they are in the minority. This is a good opportunity to write the viewpoints of the respective sides on the blackboard along with the reasons they give, and to force students to think about and even expound the arguments of others. (It is also not a bad idea to do a few exercises in classical rhetoric every now and then.) A diligent search is made for the truth that is missing; the longing for neutrality is replaced by a nobler respect for one's opponents. This is how it should be, both in the classroom and in life itself.

The group's rewriting of the news does not have to be unanimous. It may be appropriate for the text to note differences in interpreting facts, accept the account of events as it appeared in the official press, or anticipate consequences of one sort or another.

Renaming the World together: Collective Writing

The best technique for this new and active writing based on the dictates of newspapers is once again Milani's discovery of *collective writing*. The genuine high point of this pedagogy, collective writing seeks to give voice to those who live the day-to-day existence of the silent majority of the earth. Until now, books have not been written by the poor, by farmers, fishermen, labourers and shepherds. To tell the truth, the poor have not read many books, either; almost none of them buy books or have a place to put them in their homes. When they do read, it is what others have written. We have all heard the works of the great authors explained in school; they are a few isolated geniuses whom we must admire and imitate if we wish to write. As a result, we have held several mistaken beliefs: that the art of writing is a privilege, almost a gift of the gods; that it is something individual and not collective; that it is of the few and consequently for the few; and that, in order to write, it is necessary to read the authors that have gone before, the way all authors read each other's works.

The practice of collective writing follows a procedure that is the reverse of developing ideas outlined in advance. Instead, it involves an inductive process based on each person's disconnected, inarticulate ideas and intuitions. Written on little slips of paper, these individual starting points are classified, separated or grouped into themes through simple analytical and comparative exercises that result in the various chapters or aspects of the topic. Nothing is eliminated except what is strictly repetitive. Once the little slips of paper are put in order within each chapter, complete with their contradictions, they are written one after the other on large sheets that everyone can see. This is the time for collective revision, for contrasting opinions, for finding the best sequence and the best word to express exactly what was meant. At first, the participants did not know what they meant; none of them would have been able to write it all down on their own. They now learn to do so as a group; an idea is born, the word itself, while collective writing forges a collective we.

This is also the time to create a thing of beauty, to eliminate the superfluous, to prefer what is clearest to readers who belong to the masses (and not the élite). It is a time for creativity as well as discovery: reality is out there in the harsh shadows of that which we

do not control, but when we name it, it is transfigured and appears in all its brilliance. Teaching people how to talk means teaching them how to obey, giving them the world as it is named by those who order and master it. That is why it is important for these adults to become protagonists, naming everything around them for themselves. This fundamental human task has more safeguards if it is performed as a team by the masses who live in and bear the brunt of the world around them. We have already pointed out that there is room for differences, for making contrasts and for paying attention to the reasoning of others. If agreement is not reached, the final text will be enriched by the pros and cons of certain arguments.

At the school of Barbiana, collective writing became craftsmanship in the service of art. *Letter to a Schoolmistress* defines art in a surprising and profound manner that is already well known to and highly esteemed by aesthetes and sociologists alike. It should be equally valued by Christians:

> ... only insults and four-letter words came to my lips. By setting them down in this document, we have been able to contain these words with a little effort and to transform them into arguments. In so doing, we have come to understand what art is. It means loving the evil in someone or something, thinking about it at leisure, seeking the help of friends and working patiently as a team. Little by little, the truth underlying the hatred rises to the surface. A work of art is born: a hand outstretched to the enemy so that he may change his ways.[4]

This entire educational experience continually depends on the motivation to learn. It is far removed from interest in becoming part of the established order, and is rather concerned with avoiding marginalization and the world that causes it. Transforming even hatred into an outstretched hand is a truly inspired, delicate educational task. Other educators would have avoided or soothed this hatred. Milani provokes it. In the pedagogy of non-violence, with which he expressly aligns himself, Milani does not show contempt for aggressiveness but rather channels it. From his initial phase as a teacher, when he discovered that he was one, comes this surprising and extremely lucid statement:

> I do not radiate sanctity, nor am I even a likeable priest. Instead, I have all of the characteristics needed to alienate people. Even in the

> classroom, I am merciless, intolerant and provoking. I do not get along with young people by virtue of some special gift for drawing them to me. I was merely astute. I knew how to push the button that released their innermost qualities. I did not have any wealth of the soul to offer them. They were the ones who were full of riches, and no one knew it. I appealed to their pride, their natural generosity, the social angst that is the atmosphere of our time, and in so doing I touched, deep inside them, man's instinct for rebellion, for affirming his dignity as a servant of God, and nothing more.[5]

Letter to a Schoolmistress is itself the product of this technique of collective writing and, more importantly, of this pedagogy. In our own country, the same is true of *Escritos colectivos de muchachos del pueblo*[6] [Collective writings of working-class boys], developed by the students of Santiago Uno. It is also true of many other unpublished works of different lengths and purposes that have been written by various groups of people: adults who have just learned to read or belong to groups studying basic courses, young people from underprivileged backgrounds, and school-age children.

All of these works have a common thread, something too often forgotten by schools that usually devote much of their time to routine repetition of dull and meaningless things. This common thread is the first rule of writing: *one must have something important to say* that is useful to all or to many. This means not talking for the sake of talking, not engaging in empty and rhetorical verbal diarrhoea that is an end in itself and sterilizes any attempt to link writing to the real world.

This something important must be said - and written - to be read, that is, to explain one's own position where appropriate, to express views different from the opinions of those who do all of the talking in various forums, to try to influence people by speaking out together as a group, and even to give vent to internal differences.

The form varies from fully-fledged books to reflections on and evaluations of work done as a group, including letters written to newspapers in protest or support, articles providing information about activities or expressing opinions on matters of concern, or any other form. Whatever the form, all reflect a profound and passionate discussion, understanding and clarification of one's own views and those of others. There is no room for frivolity here. This is not a matter of writing compositions for school or playing at democracy.

It is something quite different from what the students of Barbiana described with reference to certain educational practices:

> I have been told that in some American schools, every time the teacher says something, half of the students raise their hands and say, "I agree." The other half say, "I disagree." The next time around, they change sides and continue chewing gum in all seriousness.[7]

Learning in Real Life: Conscientious Objection

One last educational practice deserves our attention: *visits*. Field trips from the boarding school are a required assignment in which students both learn and measure what they have learned, a good educational technique for study and evaluation. But carefully planned meetings with visitors to the school are the training ground for such field trips. A weekly ninety-minute session would be enough to get students used to asking questions and, as they themselves say in a collective text,

> That is how we learn to master language, to speak in public, to converse with people, and to overcome fear and shyness. We study and write in the classroom, but mainly we talk. The classroom is the parliament of our boarding school. We talk about things in our lives, and outsiders come and let us ask them questions.

In other words, visitors agree to allow themselves to be questioned and are free to answer or not as they wish. They do not come to lecture or to take advantage of any question to expand on their ideas. All students are required to participate, and any student may interrupt an over talkative interviewee by saying, "You are not answering the question."

As with newspapers, students must be active interpreters and not merely passive listeners. Some visitors are VIPs but, in the final analysis, all are important people even if they do not hold high positions. The school is thus also visited by students from other places and by common people, who are interesting simply by virtue of being who they are. When visitors leave, students naturally spend time thinking about the experience, polishing the notes they took during the interview, highlighting key words that generate basic

themes, and so on. Then they pool this information and calmly analyze what happened.

The same thing occurs every time the students return from a field trip. They go out in twos rather than in groups, even though group visits are also useful. The other students ask them questions, and the teacher raises issues and aspects initially overlooked. Interest grows from one field trip to another. Students open their eyes and ears. As active interpreters of reality as they experience it (and not merely as it is described in the newspapers), students become freer - but not always more effective.

Understanding reality is a step toward transforming it, but it is not enough. Few things change in this world. In this method of teaching, it is very necessary to cultivate *conscientious objection* as a habitual attitude toward the law, both formal law - which is the bastion of the strong and not the weak - and the social laws of custom and the masses colonized by the propaganda of those who hold economic power. Objection is a means of expression, of conveying meaning, of knowing who is who; it is not a guarantee of effectiveness, as if one were always seeking to achieve something. Sometimes it is more than enough to achieve one's own independence and to say no when everything conspires to force you to say yes. The educator's attitude is fundamental in this regard:

> ... I cannot tell my boys that obedience is the only way to love the law. I can tell them that they should have such esteem for the laws of men that they should obey them only when they are just (that is, when they strengthen the weak). When they see, on the other hand, that the laws of men are unjust (that is, when they condone abuses by the powerful), my boys must struggle to change them.
>
> Voting is the official mechanism for changing the law. The Constitution also adds another means: the right to strike.
>
> But the real force behind these two instruments of power is the ability to influence other voters and strikers by word and by example. When the time comes to do so, the greatest school of all is personally to pay the price of conscientious objection, that is, breaking a law that one considers unjust and accepting the penalty that it prescribes.

> ... Having the courage to tell young people that every man is supreme, that obedience is not a virtue for them but the most cunning of temptations, that they must not think obedience can shield them from man or God, that each of them must feel solely responsible for everything[8]

A liberating education, one that does not seek to co-opt people but to affirm and liberate them, runs the enormous risk of provoking clashes between students and the established order, the risk of failure and bitterness. That is why it is essential to create and encourage *celebrations* of life, as opposed to vacations free of the effort of work, and diversions from the monotony of routine. Celebrations must have a reason, a meaning, and must be warranted by something or some event. In short, we must celebrate our students' lives, even though we cannot rejoice in owning many valuable possessions. Celebrations must affirm our being on the side of good, which is not the same as owning material goods. Distinguishing between the two is the breath of life for those learning to live in a world of power and emptiness.

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2. *Experiencias pastorales* (see Note 1), p. 223.

3. Alumnos de la Escuela de Barbiana. 1982. *Carta a una maestra* [Students of the School of Barbiana, Letter to a Schoolmistress]. Barcelona: Hogar del Libro, p. 107. Italian edition: *Lettera a una professoressa*, 1967, Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina.

4. *Carta a una maestra* (see Note 2), pp. 131-2.

5. *Experiencias pastorales* (see Note 1), pp. 226-7.

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TRAINING -- A TOOL IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST ALL TYPES OF EXCLUSION? THE HISTORY OF *AFER*

Francis Gosset
Christophe Caron
Didier Andreau
Action-Formation-Etude-Recherche
Lille, France

Introduction

The main weapon against illiteracy in France today is what might be called "pedagogism".

We are among those who believe that what should be studied is the practice of and the reasons for reading; no one can learn techniques in something he or she cannot do. Reading can be taught to persons who are involved in development projects where learning to read is necessary for success. "If I live in a society that does not require me to read, I will not read."

It may seem contradictory for such a belief to be held by a training centre whose mission is educational. We may therefore wonder what can be the place of a document from a training centre combating illiteracy using extra-pedagogical practices.

In France, we are used to dealing with paradoxical situations. While we believe illiteracy is mainly a political problem, which in large part goes beyond the context of educational research and mere technical responses, we have to work in an educational area, namely training, so that we can try to provide solutions.

Apart from great conclusions announced with much fanfare, and a few initiatives taken by interdisciplinary partnerships, we have almost no real co-operative methods for the development of innovative practices in the fight against illiteracy. We have to work within the structure of the educational authorities which provide our funding, which means we must adhere to conditions that do not allow the greatest possible latitude.

Our association, which promotes political and ideological choice by offering training providing an alternative to exclusion, has been

trying since the beginning to better manage this contradiction. This is what we shall attempt to demonstrate.

We shall first attempt to describe what we have done by giving a history of our association - how, starting with an ideological choice which guided our choice of actions, these have led in turn to further reflections, which in turn have led to other actions, and so on. The battle against illiteracy has throughout held the principal place.

In part two we shall try, through description of the personalized educational workshop and the section for reintegration of the long-term unemployed, to show how, in training sequences, we try to avoid "pedagogism" by allowing individuals to take charge of their training and to develop projects in which knowing how to read makes sense to them.

1. The History of Action-Formation-Etude-Recherche (AFER)

In 1978, a training school for social workers in the Lille suburbs and the jobs of its instructors were restructured. After long and hard struggles, there were those who were not resigned to the situation. At the end of the 1970s there was a mounting wave of hopes of self-management. The discussions were long and difficult, "alternativism is the coming thing". At all events, alternative politics in France were beginning to grow.

Instructors who were victims of economic lay-offs at the School of Social Service formed the Action-Formation-Etude-Recherche [Action-Training-Study-Research] association (AFER) as a collective, proposing training that was to be "different in content and form, setting up new kinds of collaboration, new relationships within the working collective ...."

The gestation period (1978-1982)

The creation of AFER was the fruit of several years of reflection, experience and interventions among social workers in the Nord/Pas de Calais region.

"AFER's purpose is to promote, encourage and develop all methods suited to health, social and cultural training. This action is to be pursued at all stages: design, studies, contacts, training,

research" (extract from the statutes). It offered to staff working in the health and social sectors an approach different from the daily professional reality.

All the actions taken in training were part of an alternative process. The object was to construct methodological and pedagogical tools for training adults. Because we were self-managed, all members of the collective played a part in planning the day-to-day work. Each was master of his or her own actions, from the birth of an idea through design, negotiation and completion to evaluation (extract from the planning text for creation of the *Atelier pédagogique personnalisé* [personalized educational workshop] 1986).

A dual goal was set for the first year: to continue intervention in continuing education with employees in the health and social sector and to make ourselves known.

Training was principally centred on psychiatric personnel. It was supplemented by the creation of a structure for putting forward our ideas to others. This took the form of action through regional, national and international media, discussion evenings, and study days on themes in the anti-psychiatry sphere.

Along with the work in continuing training and the building of our image, we reflected on other actions to be implemented and other areas for intervention. AFER wanted to offer something broader, a mutual sharing of resources. This was the birth of "AFER-dissemination", a three-year experiment to provide musical and theatrical groups with part-time secretarial help to manage the administrative tasks related to cultural activity.

Four main ideas thus regulated the life of our emerging structure:

- continuing training of personnel in the health and social sector;
- making the association permanent by creating a permanent mechanism for discussion and confrontation concerning practices in the battle against exclusion;
- promotion of cultural enterprises through sharing of technical resources;
- experimentation with new kinds of relationships in the enterprise.

Emergence of the problem of illiteracy

The goal of becoming known through creating a place for debate on exclusion began to bear fruit. Intervention with employees in the health and social field gave birth to new examination of, among other things, the suggestion of joint intervention among employees and the public in the sector. Following technical training experiments with handicapped workers in the *Centres d'aide par le travail* [centres for aid through work] (CAT), which were sheltered workshops for adult handicapped persons considered unable to work in an ordinary milieu, AFER was asked to set up training aimed at integrating young handicapped workers into a regular workplace.

The success of this project brought about the first big change in the organization. New measures put in place by the new socialist government, particularly the plan for social and professional integration for young persons 16 to 25 (the Swartz Plan) gave rise to AFER's work in the area of integration.

Measures accompanying the creation of the mechanism for integration of young people would henceforth provide a legal and financial framework for actions taken to train young job-seekers.

At the end of eighteen months of operation, these training courses were not as successful as we had hoped. First conclusions were roughly as follows:

- The goal of integration into the ordinary environment did not seem to work, at least in the short term, with these people, who were too marked out in society, too circumscribed and in a poor psychological state. The time period allowed and the methods used for these courses were too limited to achieve the goal of integration into the working world given to the organizations.

- The tools for intervention were not adapted to this public, especially those concerning the approach to illiteracy. It became increasingly clear that this problem was the main obstacle to access to training and, by extension, to employment.

At the time, the organizations working in the field of illiteracy made the same observation: the enormous difficulty, if not inability, to deal with illiteracy using traditional teaching methods, without training for the instructors and without policies and research. Since

up to that time illiteracy had been considered non-existent in France, the lack of research and therefore of teaching tools suited to coping with it was understandable.

Faced with these observations, AFER took two types of measures:

- review of the strategy for intervention. The public was too young, too troubled, to be integrated into a job, even in the medium term. The legal framework, means and time periods were not suited to any in-depth action. AFER reoriented its work towards an older public, within a framework of experimental actions for a two-year period;

- assignment of two permanent staff members to study national and international teaching methods and experiences in the battle against illiteracy. The investigations resulted in a meeting with the *Association française pour la lecture* (AFL). It was love at first sight! All the members of the organization took teacher-training courses at the AFL's school and became committed to a very clear reading policy.

From the meeting with AFL to the regional illiteracy day

Meeting with AFL: a resolve taken

We had met with an association where the practices and concepts echoed what we had perceived in the field. According to AFL's Jean Foucambert, changes in the reading situation in France depended on the implementation of a comprehensive policy.

An action limited to a single area only benefits those who have no need of help in other areas. Improving the technical level of reading without doing anything else only helps those who can already read. New measures were called for:

- A continuing information campaign about reading and its significance, so that the social status of reading and non-reading could be examined;

- Reading means to accept sharing power, taking on responsibilities and agreeing that the greatest number of people possible should take responsibilities;

- Helping to increase the number of readers means questioning one's own experience as a reader;

- Promoting the use of collective equipment that would allow choice of what one is going to read;

- Designing action to promote reading as an aid to exercising a skill, going from assumed rejection, through questioning and change of mind to choice;

- Developing new written material with different values and terms of reference;

- Reading begins processes whose nature and complexity is far different from those that require the rudimentary use of literacy, which is still that possessed by close to 70% of individuals today. That is to say that an important methodological investment had to be made, both in initial learning and in the subsequent phases of improvement.[1]

To teach reading, to empower the greatest number and help them to share this power, is our project and the goal our actions have been aimed at since our association was created. It remained for us to learn AFL's pedagogical methods in order to use our training tools better and then to take up our pilgrim's staff to meet new adventures and new debates.

Regional illiteracy day (17 October 1984)

Following the methods adopted at AFER, the investment in AFL's pedagogical methods could not remain a secret. Preliminary observations of our experiences with adults had to be discussed in public. The reality of action being taken to deal with illiteracy, along with the rising curve of unemployment, concerned not only educationists.

After a series of interventions concerning the illiteracy problem, working committees set out a list of questions and directions for future work:

- Action should be taken to provide information in order to demystify accepted ideas about the matter;

- Is it useful to know how to read today, given technical progress, particulary the development of robotics?

- Is combating illiteracy not a kind of normalization?

- Existing training methods and their limitations should be assessed;

- Is a specific mechanism needed?

- A file on organizations working in literacy in the region should be made up and distributed;

- Preventive actions against illiteracy should be taken in early childhood. Interventions should be made and support provided in schools and school-related activities for those under 16;

- Training adapted to literacy trainers is needed;

- Is it necessary to be in a pleasurable situation to be a reader?

- These days the non-reader is increasingly inundated with written material. Without tools to decode them, he or she becomes more and more marginalized. What are the best ways to develop these tools?

The number of those who participated in this regional day (250) demonstrated the significance of the problem and the powerlessness of many trainers.

The third stage: experimental actions to help long-term unemployed and handicapped long-term unemployed persons when the APPs were set up.

Following the orientation day, the organization put to use what it had learned at AFL and at the conference on continuing education. Sensitization courses were offered to teams of professionals who wanted to take action concerning reading in their establishments. Joint training sessions suggested to users and to professionals that they question their status as readers, and reflect on the act of reading and on what methodological and pedagogical methods could be used.

At the same time, between 1983 and 1985, AFER set up experimental actions for long-term unemployed persons over 21 and long-term unemployed persons with handicaps who were recognized as being able to work or were working in a regular workplace. At the time there was no mechanism for taking charge of these persons. Training was aimed at social and vocational integration of a public with difficulties (illiterates, persons with behaviour problems or difficulties in relating with others, persons with motor or mental handicaps, persons leaving prison or being followed up after psychiatric treatment, and so on).

Our knowledge of this public in the context of various institutions, and the questioning of these in the face of barriers and exclusion, led us to take action for integration into the ordinary milieu, outside of an institutional framework.

Our experience with young people led us to set up long-term actions. It takes more than a few weeks for us to help people become autonomous, find or recover their place in space and time, open themselves to the social, vocational and cultural world, move beyond strategies to avoid or circumvent written material after years spent withdrawing and turning in on themselves. We wanted to lead these persons out of a circumscribed life, caused by long-term unemployment or a mental health problem, by using real situations.

The experience of these two courses led us to the idea of individualized training where self-evaluation and self-training could be acquired in real situations in which the trainee could bring about a positive result.

There were conclusive results from work with these persons: they became more autonomous, more open, they had more self-confidence, which allowed them to cope with constantly recurring situations leading inevitably to failure; they achieved integration into the world of work, and sometimes into training leading to qualifications, which had been previously unimaginable.

It is in precise projects to be carried out that people become aware of the relationship that everyone has with written material (whether it be use or avoidance of this material) and it is starting with this awareness, encouraged by the training context, that learning how to read can begin. Any demand that did not respect these steps would place the individual in the role of student again, setting up between trainer and trainee the ambiguous relationship that exists between one who has the answers and one who needs them.

AFER today. What remains of our original passion?

Today, *AFER* has 24 salaried staff working in the following 8 areas of intervention:

- Personalized teaching workshops (5 paid workers and one conscientious objector).
  Clientele: all members of the public over 16, whatever their level, project, problems and status.
  Partners: State, region, department, communes, *Fonds d'action sociale* (FAS), *Agence pour l'emploi*, social workers, businesses, reception and counselling organizations and so on.

- Long-term unemployed, Lille (5 employees).

- Long-term unemployed, Tourcoing (4 employees).
  Clientele: young people and adults looking for jobs, workers who are handicapped, persons who are leaving prison or psychiatric institutions.
  Partners: State, region, department, commune, *Agence pour l'emploi*, social workers, *Direction du travail*, businesses, reception and counselling organizations and so on.

- Continuing education (3 employees).
  Clientele: personnel in the health and social sector, business employees, etc.
  Partners: mainly businesses.

- Multi-media (2 employees)
  Clientele: no direct clientele. Multi-media teaching tools are produced.
  Partners: State/region, businesses involved in new technology and audio-visual materials, social workers, reception and counselling organizations.

- Secretariat (4 employees)

- *"La petite Maison"*. This operates with the participation of full-time staff from the other areas.
  Clientele: any person accompanied by a child under four who wants to discuss early childhood.
  Partners: as with the other areas, plus all structures dealing with early childhood and partners in the neighbourhood where the project is set up.

- Two employees are now seconded to a regional mission called *Nouvelles qualifications* in Villeneuve d'Ascq.

The idea of different areas is related to the nature of the intervention, the public affected and this public's legal structure. Some employees work in several areas at the same time. In principle, any employee can change his or her area of work,

As well as these sectors of intervention, we have co-operative groups. These research groups are where practices are compared, in an area of work (reading for example), with a specific public or with tools (the multimedia section and the *Petite maison* are tools created after multilateral discussion in these groups). One permanent employee is assigned as resource person for this group.

Since the beginning we have maintained the principle of self-management. Each full-time employee is paid the same salary. There is no director. Each can carry a project through from conception to negotiation, completion and evaluation. Each is careful to play his or her role as an institutional representative. Each is a member of the association and as such participates in the monthly general meeting with voting rights.

The day-to-day and central management of the structure is looked after by a pool of representatives designated by those working in the various areas; each area uses the management method most appropriate to its work.

In terms of organization of working hours, we have: time for institutional negotiation, time for research and preparation, time for co-ordination and time for intervention. The time is divided up in terms of area of work and period of reference.

Our area of intervention is mainly regional. It is concentrated on Lille, Tourcoing and Villeneuve d'Ascq for publics with problems, spread over the whole territory for continuing education.

We have many partners. There is no central place in the institution integrating outside partners. Each area of work, and at times each individual, deals with the network of partners. One area might invite partners to a pilot group to discuss a certain problem (for example in the APP, see the next section); another might meet its partners in an evaluation meeting after action has been taken, or in a working group.

This is also true for the public using our services. Each area deals with things on a case-by-case basis. Trainees might set their own schedule in one project, in another they might have an operating budget and have to manage it themselves.

Overall, we encourage persons to define their training goals and we suggest a course of self-training to them (self-management of training, see the following section). One of our objectives is to have trainees take responsibility for their own progress.

The question of their integration in the central management of the association is a perennial one. That said, we have not yet found a formula to make this possible. It is the same problem as with the partners - those providing funding and other institutions - with the difficulty of limits of training time on the one hand and, on the other, the difficulty these people have following this kind of procedure. Since they have never been asked to share power, when we attempt to have them do so it seems bizarre, almost indecent, to them.

Another problem is the lack, locally and nationally, of efforts to bring together persons with problems who could represent these people in the structures that concern them. Because of the deterioration in the state of the union movement and its traditional lack of interest in the jobless, we do not believe that the unions - given their present structure and orientations - would be the best representatives.

This, briefly, is the institutional context in which the AFER collective exists. We have become considerably more active in the last twelve years. This increased activity and institutionalization is not without a certain number of problems and questions, particularly with regard to choice and forms of intervention with the public. We shall come back to this question in the conclusion.

Now that we have painted the backdrop, we shall describe two kinds of intervention with the public in which reading plays a prominent part.

2. Two Examples of Intervention

2.1 ATELIER PÉDAGOGIQUE PERSONNALISÉ [PERSONALIZED EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOP] (APP)

In 1985, the national network of APPs was set up, and AFER formed an APP in October of 1986.

In principle, the APP is an open, individualized educational facility, allowing all persons to develop a training activity, a link between the course of training and vocational integration, due in particular to emphasis on use of self-training methods.

The primary objective of the APP is to provide general training that can be supplemented by an approach to basic technology (such as understanding and using a technical tool in various situations). In no case is this training of a vocational nature. The APP does not provide career counselling or evaluation.

The APP is meant mainly for individuals who have a personal or vocational project that is sufficiently defined and who are voluntarily undertaking training. It is intended for a public at all levels and of all origins (employees, young or adult job seekers, etc.). There is no minimum level required to make use of APPs.

The requirements also stipulate that all publics (except salaried workers) must be referred to the APP by an information and counselling reception centre, a local mission, the *Agence nationale pour l'emploi* or other such organization. If a person comes directly to the APP, he or she must be put in touch with a reception centre so that follow-up can be done. For this purpose, a liaison sheet is filled out at reception to inform the APP of the number of trainees they have referred.

The APP's goal is to supplement other mechanisms for continuing education (regional program, special examination for university entrance, social advancement and so on).

The following steps take place in the training period:

- a phase in which the training is defined before a training contract is signed;

- training evaluation periods, in which the trainer provides the learner with immediate information on his or her progress, shortcomings and ways to remedy them, through discussions;

- self-training using tools provided to the trainee;

- personalized support provided by trainers and resource persons;

- evaluation phase at the end of the training contract;

- return to the reception organization.

In its field of competence, the APP places the trainee and defines a contract with individual goals, which on average does not exceed 150 hours. The contract can be renewed in exceptional cases and in no case can it replace training that could be given by a training organization for the job market. It is signed by the trainee and the trainer. It makes clear:

- the objectives;
- the content of the training;
- the overall duration of the training and minimum weekly attendance by the trainee at the APP;
- the work plan;
- the ways the expected skills will be recognized and/or validated.

The reception organization is informed of this contract when the liaison sheet is returned.

At the end of training, each person receives a certificate, part of a portfolio of competencies, on which is recorded:

- the name and content of the training taken through this contract;
- skills acquired at the end of the contract;
- validations achieved in general training.

How we operate

The APP is not a training course in the traditional sense of the term, that is, training that starts on a certain date and ends on another with X persons taking the same course, selected with regard to pre-established terms of reference, with presupposed educational levels. It is a training structure that is constantly moving, intended for all persons (job seekers, employees, handicapped workers, persons receiving health and social support), no matter what the training

project might be. The project in this latter case can be the act of developing the project. The idea that the APP is not a course is explained by the fact that each trainee comes to it at a different level, with different expectations. It is impossible for the training centre to develop a common program or length of training period, given the heterogeneity of its public and of their status, levels and needs. In this sense, the APP is a tangled web of workshops with the individual's training project at its centre. Training is without salary, free, and takes place part-time on a weekly basis. Time spent in training is 300 hours for those over 25 and 150 hours for those who are younger. Trainees spend an average of 15 hours per week at the APP. Training may be stopped at any time if the person has managed to enter certificated training, returns to work or simply finds the services we offer unsuitable. Training does not lead to qualifications (we cannot grant qualifications nor do we wish to be able to do so). Training begins after a weekly information meeting for the purpose of explaining the goal of training. At the end of the information meeting, persons state whether or not they want to become part of the APP. For those who do, a time is set for an individual meeting and discussion. This meeting of about an hour allows us to get to know the person and to sketch out a possible project in the APP, dates, times and content.

A preliminary plan is worked out in terms of what the person has been able to express; this plan can be modified at certain times during training (we shall return to this). A six-week period of self-evaluation and an individual meeting are also scheduled. The first six-week training evaluation allows the trainees to see where they stand in their training and, through exchanges, to develop their expectations from training.

Training is now begun, and we shall continue this presentation later.

Self-training

The situation when training ends is not the only parameter for evaluating the progress in training of a trainee in the APP: self-training provides another.

Our training objectives in the APP can be summed up as direct or indirect vocational integration. However, we feel it is indispensable to take other fundamental aspects into consideration, such as social integration and autonomy.

Our training process aims at considering these two inseparable aspects from the beginning. Because of this, all training has indirect effects on the life and behaviour of the trainee: revitalization, a new rhythm of life, a different social status. But because of the kind of public we serve, we must emphasize this implicit role of training to give it an explicit training character.

Making this clear means leading the trainees to take part, to become active in working towards their future and, as a beginning, in their own training. It means causing them to give up their wait-and-see attitude of being merely spectators.

To achieve this result, we have to create learning situations. The first learning situation, which is most likely to bring about change, is training. To exploit this training situation we must give trainees freedom to take an active role. They are no longer the "trained", they have the potential to have power over themselves during the ensuing period of respite, thanks to the neutrality possible in the training situation. Participation in the APP is not to receive pay, but because of a desire for training and reclassification.

We suggest to the trainee an area of action which is certainly within a structure but is empty, without content, and he or she possesses the key to it. This is our primary objective at the APP: to give the individual tools to become an actor in the training.

However, self-training has limitations:

- denial of any support from others (I trained myself all by myself).

- ideological use of self-training: having persons work their way alone through constraining systems of social relationships, persuading them that they have power that they do not, in fact, possess.[2]

But it is by keeping these limits in mind that we can work in the right direction. At a time when cracks are appearing in the educational system's primary function - social reproduction - some patching up is required. Self-training seems to be a good method.

The practice of self-training as analysed by Gaston Pineau cannot be separated from a project where a person takes personal power over his or her life and training.

Self-evaluation

In the same way that trainees tend to become actors in their own training, they want to plan the course of their own training, seeing what is at stake.

A first training evaluation at six weeks allows trainees to see where they stand with regard to their training and to develop through discussions their expectations from training. We have chosen to formalize this first phase, knowing that each of the trainees negotiates the content of training every two weeks.

Working from requests from trainees, we have planned activities with three objectives:

- to bring about evaluation and self-evaluation;
- to work out personalized training projects and the necessary content of training;
- to lead the trainees to more autonomy in taking charge of their training, in both content and method.

The trainees work following an activity plan that allows them to evaluate themselves and their training project in terms of vocational orientation. These activities must also provide time for individualized work and relate to the existing mechanism for training.

An evaluation is carried out systematically after each workshop. The tool used is the self-evaluation booklet, in which the trainee reports what he or she has learned in a session and what he or she is in the course of learning. An evaluation workshop takes place every two weeks with sub-groups of trainees supervised by an advisory trainer. This evaluation is done in relation to objectives to be attained, thus allowing content to be improved. A monthly individual evaluation meeting allows for verification of the whole project for social and vocational integration.

The self-evaluation booklet is an aide-mémoire for trainees. It is a written record of their progress and also verifies the coherence between the initial project and their requests for modifications as the project goes along.

Although we have revised it several times, we are still not satisfied with the trainee's booklet. It is very awkward to use and some trainees have a great deal of difficulty with it from day to

day. They do not understand our insistence on its use and on what they consider repetition (for example, several reminders of the project evaluation every two weeks). Some people have a very academic view of training and prefer results to the process, independent of goals.

However, there are significant benefits:

- fewer discrepancies between the trainees' objectives and the content of the training;

- ease of follow-up, especially for trainers who were not in charge of the trainees in question;

- the trainee has the pleasure of accumulating a written record of his or her progress and the booklet is the best tool for validating the program.

In spite of everything, we think the booklet is indispensable. We are at present thinking about modifying it, and in particular about ways of having the trainees get involved in these deliberations.

Heterogeneous public and individualization

We feel it is desirable to serve a heterogeneous public, starting from the observation that it is not very relevant to address a public which has difficulties while shutting them into training that is all aimed specifically at a public with a low level. We have chosen rather to open the APP to a heterogeneous public, both as to level of projects and of education. Thus we can offer to all trainees a structure centred not on mass integration of knowledge, but rather on reflection on use of this knowledge. This is also so that we can meet the growing demands for training from a public that we have not traditionally served.

A heterogeneous public is necessary to stimulate group dynamics, while not preventing the individualization of training.

Management of schedule of conditions

We are also faced with a paradox: our work involves self-training; but the framework imposed on us, and certain ideas of control that have been introduced, do not always encourage this method. The APP is involved in constant relationships with local partners.

Because of the specificity of the APP's operation, these relations are difficult to manage. They are formalized by:

- individualized meetings;
- follow-up groups for trainees (partners who take over);
- pilot group;
- thematic groups (illiteracy, minimum wage for integration, research).

The partners with whom we collaborate are representative of the APP's identity. This identity is chosen by the organization, which has developed its competencies and strategies by favouring service to a marginalized public having problems with social and vocational integration. We continue, however, to accept a heterogeneous public, because the APP should never be seen as an APP ghetto, reproducing the image of failure among the public it serves.

We must respond to any request for training that can be done at the APP, whatever it may be. The APP wants to have a real representative image of the local demands and needs for training of a public that is experiencing exclusion.

Examples of intervention through workshops

There are three types of workshop, offering different training, even if at times the dividing lines remain intentionally blurred to allow for adaptation to individual situations and to persons looking for a place suitable for them.

"Theme" workshops

These workshops bring together persons who at any given time show similar needs in the same area (reading, arithmetic). They offer to publics with a low degree of autonomy (new arrivals, for example) the possibility of learning basic knowledge in a group. This is also the best place to start reflection or the process of self-training (What does it mean to be a reader? What does it mean to learn? How do we learn?).

This is also where teaching can rely on group dynamics, on collective projects such as production of a newspaper. Work with a public with problems requires going through phases of socialization, which is not easy in other training situations, in individual work, for example.

Without these workshops we would not be able to motivate certain persons whose primary problem is more a need for structure than for training.

These different objectives may or may not exist simultaneously. They are regulated by how the groups are made up at a given time. Similarly, certain themes emerge, others fade away, depending on the persons' interests at any one time. Thus, at a meeting of a group of women, the desire to set up a workshop with early childhood as the theme emerged, a workshop that no longer exists except in the form of attendance at the *Petite maison* (reception centre for mothers and children, managed by AFER).

Newspaper and writing workshop

The aim of this workshop is not to cover all the skills involved in writing the French language, but to touch on all work that can be done on writing: summarizing, planning, construction of a text and so on. The main support of this workshop is the newspaper. Trainees write articles which, once completed, are assembled as a newspaper, which is then distributed internally to instructors, trainees and also to certain persons outside. It is not strictly necessary to know how to write to participate in this workshop. Each person works at his or her own pace, although the date the newspaper is to come out sets a goal for the person to reach: "What must I do so that my article will be in the next newspaper?" This leads to setting up a schedule, organization of work and so forth.

In theory, a trainee goes from using paper and pencil to using a computer for desktop publishing. Not all trainees work on the computer, it would be too difficult to manage. The texts are revised, corrections are made in a group. In this way we touch on the rules of grammar and spelling, which have more effect when work is done in a group on a text which means something to the trainees.

Several possibilities are presented to the trainees:

- they can choose one or more common themes;

- each can choose the theme best suited to him or her and work alone or with several others on the same theme;

- they can choose a subject such as their work, their life or a topic in the news and work on an individual article.

Reading
In this case we ascertain the different kinds of writing in the person's immediate life and, starting from this basis, try to integrate reading behaviours into his or her life. It is of prime importance that the reading trainees be able to reconstruct the experiences and written material they meet with in other workshops (this point will be developed later). It is important to go back to them in the reading workshop.

Arithmetic
The traineès participate in this workshop following a work plan defined in the course of the initial interview. First of all the work program is fixed, then the trainee works out a program with the instructor and makes use of files with exercises suitable to the chosen level.

Other workshops will then "feed" this one, especially the cooking workshop (budget management), book-keeping, and anything that trainees may meet with in daily life which causes them problems.

Job-search techniques
Apart from the purely practical aspect of job-search techniques, (CVs, letters and so on), time in this workshop is also spent on working out projects since many have difficulties in immediately starting on production of a CV or letters.

Often the method used is for a trainee to come and go throughout the workshop, with use of job-search techniques either validating or invalidating the initial project. This is also the workshop where we can help people looking for training.

Functional workshops
The purpose of these workshops is to facilitate basic learning, in reading and arithmetic, for example, for persons with major

difficulties. They allow for use of different support material, stimulating interest in completing projects and relating the work to daily life.

These workshops (photography, oral expression, computer science, cooking) are not meant to train photographers and so on, but to offer technical frameworks where, according to liking for a particular field, the trainees will try to verify the relevance of their projects.

For persons with major difficulties who thus feel excluded from any traditional learning situation with pencil and paper, these workshops offer a place for success, and often start up a process of regaining self-respect, which is necessary for undertaking any training.

The evaluation that we do of our work means that we modify these workshops either in form or content or by using other tools. They also evolve in terms of demand from the public and are thus often constantly changing, especially in the course of the monthly trainees' meeting where trainees can make suggestions. This time for expression is meant for the trainees. We try to have them run this meeting as far as possible, which poses certain problems. Preparation can be done in certain workshops, such as oral expression. A suggestion box is available. Ideas collected allow the schedule to be set and they are dealt with by the group of trainees present at the meeting: questions, suggestions, etc.

Workshops for individual work

Persons work autonomously and have at least one opportunity a week for individual work. The goal for each trainee is to succeed in managing time and pace of work, to use the most suitable tools or those which suit him or her best, not to deviate from the planned project and to become an active participant in his or her training.

The process should be facilitated by the trainee record booklet. The content of these workshops is prepared in the theme and/or functional workshops.

Links between workshops

These three kinds of intervention are closely linked and only make sense in relation to each other. It is the trainee's project that must be the common thread in participation in the workshops.

Thus, the workshops interact among themselves, making requests and responding to them, ensuring a link in the trainee's progress as

well. For example, at one point, the group in the reading workshop, who were working on daily writing, sent an order to the photography workshop for pictures to illustrate a recipe. The trainees made their request explicit: they wanted photos of the different steps in the recipe with the various ingredients and utensils pointed out and named.

These persons then participated in the photography workshop, which was transformed into a cooking/photography workshop. Then the texts and photograph captions were worked out in the newspaper workshop and in the individual work periods. The photographs and text were assembled using desktop publishing software on the computer, the recipe and pictures were published in the newspaper and then used again in the reading workshop.

It is essential for the trainee to be aware at the time of the initial interview that his or her training will be constructed around his or her project (even if the training project is the construction of the latter). The project evolves and involves giving value to intermediate projects; it allows the trainee to measure results.

A workshop, whatever it may be, never has defined content. It offers the trainee different tools and situations so that he or she can achieve immediate objectives, never losing sight of the fact that what he or she has achieved is never without value, but is well integrated into his or her own project.

Tools to combat illiteracy

Newspapers

Since the creation of the APP, we have been trying to set up a training period that would help people to produce written material: a workshop time sufficiently open so that people mastering this tool at various levels could work together but also so that there would be readers for what was produced to make it meaningful.

The newspaper quickly came to seem the most suitable format. Newspapers are a mosaic of written material, allowing each person to give free rein to imagination while respecting the production pace of all.

After a long odyssey with trials and errors, after many "zeros" in quality that improved along with our stock of equipment, we have succeeded in structuring a permanent workshop and publish this newspaper relatively regularly.

How is this done?

The writing workshop takes place every Tuesday morning. Each trainee, whether registered or not in the workshop, can think about and write a piece with a theme of his or her choice. These texts will appear as columns in the newspaper.

Following this there is collective discussion to determine a common theme to be used in one issue of the paper. Brainstorming is the method used, which then allows ideas to be structured into a plan where each person can participate according to interest in some aspect or other of the subject. At the same time, discussion is begun on what is to be written and who the readers are.

The next phase is production of texts, either in this workshop or in others such as individual work, reading or others (for example, in the context of documentary research in the library or in other outside resource centres).

When the writing has been completed and corrected by the writer (at the end of the process we correct the remaining errors), the text is entered on computer.

We then move on to an exchange of texts and each sums up someone else's text so as to come up with a headline and work on the technique of summarization. At the same time we look for pictures to illustrate each article.

A collective session works out a preliminary paste-up which will be used again in the workshop for introduction to computers as a tool for learning desktop publishing and computer-assisted design software.

Each cycle ends with a discussion on the content and form of the last issue. This organization is, of course, theoretical and managed according to who is registered in a given period. In principle, the process goes on for a month or six weeks.

We have described the structure, let us go on to the tools available to the trainees. Apart from the time for discussion and co-operation, paper and pencils, we have good supplies of paper board, photo supplies for developing and printing, a video-camera, editing equipment, audio-visual documentary collections, a Minitel with which we can call up data on computer - AFP press dispatches, for example - newspapers and periodicals, books, tape recorders, IBM-compatible PCs with word processing, desktop publishing and design software, a scanner, a laser printer, a photocopier, access to all the other workshops and, of course, outside resources.

The structure and resources used by this workshop make up a mechanism that is open and constantly changing for the production of written material.

Educational software: ELMO (Entraînement à la lecture par micro ordinateur) [Reading instruction on microcomputer] and MAC6 (software for self-teaching in mathematics)

ELMO is used in the reading workshop and is an obligatory part of this workshop. This tool is worthwhile in so far as the exercises it offers for reading training are constructed from texts produced by the trainees. The trainee types in his or her own text, then the work is corrected with the help of a trainer. Also, the results are quantifiable and it is possible to analyse the different aspects with the trainees.

MAC6 is used in the mathematical workshop where the trainee progresses as the sessions go on, according to the project and work area chosen.

Library-Documentation centre

The library and documentation centre is of interest because it has a whole series of files with exercise sheets that can be corrected by trainees according to each one's area of work and level. It also provides a central area for information available to trainees in their different areas of interest.

The concept of the library-documentation centre allows the trainees to find answers, to use the files independently, according to the work program set up. Of course, that is not obvious, especially at the beginning of training, but this is the direction the trainee should aim for.

We are at present working on other training tools: software for management of pedagogical resources is being studied and experiments are going on. The purpose of these studies is to:

- facilitate and thus encourage use of the library-documentation centre by an illiterate public (they can learn to use software based on symbols);

- restructure this area using statistical analysis of frequency of use of various support materials;

- correlate content and pace of learners' training and profiles.

Video
This tool is especially used in the oral expression workshop: work on televised daily news, simulated interviews and so forth. These are filmed and then used again in the workshop, where they require a story board.

Also planned is a self-service audio-visual area. This project will come about through setting up of a video and audio library, whose resources will support all the workshops.

Intervention, other areas
Remaining faithful to our past (artistic expression course) and our original intentions (to promote and develop all means suited to health, social and cultural training ...) we intend to continue to work on research for alternatives to any kind of exclusion, including cultural ghettos.

The collective desire at AFER is to integrate artistic expression with all other training processes. We do not want to set up culture as a pedagogical-therapeutic tool, as is often done in the health and social sector. We are trying to bring about a juxtaposition. We believe that there is a difference between occupational or therapeutic educational techniques and an artistic practice calling first of all on the creative possibilities that each of us has or may have, no matter what our social status. This is why we attempt to have professional artists intervene in some organized meetings:

- courses for social and vocational integration for long-time job seekers, co-animated by AFER and a theatrical director;

- participation in activities and administration of the "Arts and Health" association, whose aim is to promote artistic practice among handicapped, aged and infirm persons;

- transformation of our premises into exhibition rooms and concert halls for our tenth anniversary;

- continuing education for personnel in the social sector, providing training with a cultural dimension.

This idea also exists within the APP, where we have had:

- a professional photographer in a workshop on job-search techniques;

- a sculptor in a reading/writing workshop;

- an actor who works full-time as animator in an oral expression workshop, using theatrical techniques.

We are going to be able to continue to introduce the cultural dimension because the City of Lille and the local youth mission have agreed a scheme for funding leisure activities. The purpose is to encourage our trainees to "digest" shows (theatre, concerts, films) at a minimal price of 10 FF per show and to then make use of these experiences in training (research for information on the shows, making reservations, organization, production of written material, use of desktop publishing software to produce a special issue of the trainees' newspaper).

The APP is thus a structure constantly seeking to be more relevant in its field of action. There are problems in achieving this.

The practice of self-training that is intended faces difficulties that are mainly due to:

- change in the public served: the training sought is expressed more often these days in terms of upgrading skills. Persons contacting the APP have an increasingly distant perspective on integration into a job, which more and more is becoming a remote goal for them. The desire for upgrading gains in urgency what it loses in meaning. It hinders development of various interventions possible in the APP, interventions that are not directly related to training, but which are an unavoidable framework for achieving fixed goals;

- the fact that there is no pay for training, which presents a problem for people who are voluntarily working in the APP but who see themselves hampered by the fact that this training is not paid. However, it is obvious that if there were pay, we would be faced with other problems: persons would certainly come to the APP not because what was available there would met their needs but because their participation was paid for.

2.2 INTEGRATION OF THE LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED

At the end of the 1970s, training schemes that were said to be the means to combat unemployment began to be set up. These were very quickly made so complex that it was difficult to make sense of the proliferation of measures, which were sometimes complementary, but at times duplicated each other. It was only in 1985 that the scheme for training adults over 25 was really structured, with the setting up of modular courses.

A specific program was set up aimed at the long-term job-seeking public, comprised of the hard-core unemployed, unaffected by favourable fluctuations in the job market. This specific scheme was to improve the chances of a job for these categories or, to quote Foudi and Stankiewiz, to "improve their place in the line-up".[3]

This program is managed today by the departmental employment branches under the name AIF (*Action d'insertion et de formation* [Integration and training initiative]). Job seekers affected by this measure have the status of job trainees and are paid. This program serves three functions:

- slowing the process of exclusion and marginalization, aid taking precedence over placement for one segment of the public;

- to increase the "intrinsic employability" of the job seeker through training oriented towards resocialization, motivation and job-search techniques;

- to improve qualifications so as to narrow the gap between the qualifications of the job seeker and those required for the job.

The public

A recent study by the departmental employment branch attempted to draw up a profile of long-term job seekers served by the AIF in the north-east part of Lille:

Type 1
Over 40, loss of steady job, often after an economic lay-off. According to their social competence, the individuals have been able, more or less successfully, to move into temporary employment. The

scarcity of jobs not requiring qualifications in this specific market and the competition from younger persons supported by the mechanism has pushed them all into total unemployment.

Type 2
Mostly under 40, they intended to obtain a stable job, but the redeployment of industrial jobs has deprived them of this opportunity. According to their social competence, closely related to their level of general culture, they have been able to live or survive with temporary jobs. Some have never been employed (or never worked for a long enough period to obtain rights).

Type 3
Often women, often immigrants. They seldom know how to read and write, they have great difficultly with oral expression, and have no working experience. When their partner or relatives become unemployed and their children find it impossible to find jobs, they are forced into the job market.

Type 4
Often under 40, male, with immigrant parents, they realize the impossibility of finding work and their elders' experience is no longer a role model. They are very likely divorced from the dominant value system, which gives an important place to work. They exploit the possibilities (the only ones) that "the system" offers to them, which are "courses" that they tend to substitute for work.

Type 5
These are adult males over 35 who have never had a steady job. From the most proletarian fringe of the working class, they have grown up with uncertainty (families with major problems, social assistance, in child care institutions during their childhood, and so on). They share the value system of the working class: attachment to the patriarchal organization of the family and to the "work ethic", but it is in this class that "moonlighting" is over-valued. They cannot all be classed as illiterate, but the great majority of them have difficulties dealing with the written word.

Some aspects of our intervention

The teaching method that we are developing in our integration work fits in with the work already described for setting up a process of individual and collective self-training aimed at the autonomy of groups and individuals.

In a context of self-training aimed at vocational integration, persons meet with many experimental situations requiring use of written material: the telephone book for setting up meetings, street signs to get to the meetings. administrative papers, job advertisements, and so on. We try to the utmost, in all training sequences, to set up situations that require the trainee's having direct contact with writing and which usually lead to action (learning to read).

The group

The pedagogy for self-training and making individuals responsible that we have developed plays an important role in the training group. One might think that self-training, by reinforcing the idea of personal qualities to the detriment of the idea of being a member of a group, omits the idea of the group. This is not the case at all. Our teaching methods are based on negotiation: trainers must have trainees agree to what they suggest, which obliges them always to take into account each person's project. Trainees cannot obtain the assistance of trainers unless they prove that this assistance will be useful to their project. This process introduces a balance of relationships: the weaker the rights of the group members, the more the group resembles a group of "school kids"; the stronger they are, the closer the group comes to resembling a group of social actors.

By making the trainees responsible for the space and time for training, we in fact give them a grasp of all its dimensions. Management of constraints of time, space and resources and taking the environment into account (social and administrative rules, for example) are no longer only the jurisdiction of trainers. Through sharing responsibility, the constraints become the concern of both trainees and trainers, and make mutual management necessary. Management of constraints of all types means that trainees will have to deal with more writing; they have to argue, prove, and justify their position to be able to intervene directly, with real significance, in the resolution of problems.

The effect of socialization that the group and this pedagogical method has on the individual is fundamental. The person becomes aware of his or her differences and finds external responses indispensable for working out his or her project. Finally the person becomes aware of where he or she fits into society.

Rotation

Training does not take place only in training centres, but also, for periods of varying lengths, in commercial enterprises. This rotating training provides good opportunities for dealing with writing.

First, the trainee has to find a corporation that will accept him or her. This requires an unavoidable use of written words (telephone book or business directory, writing an application letter, finding out about corporations that might offer a position and so forth). For the individual who is looking for a place in an enterprise, this dealing with writing makes sense since it is based on "real writing" that the person needs to do and read and not on artificial exercises.

A positive response, after several stages of looking for work, gives meaning to the necessary use of reading and writing, much more surely than any theoretical training lecture.

The periods in a commercial enterprise are also useful because of the many kinds of writing the individual faces: use of machines, work instructions, orders, internal regulations, training reports and so on.

Orders from society at large

Through a network of partners within pilot groups (librarians, employees of socio-cultural associations, social workers, representatives from corporations), we are trying to encourage demand for the trainees' work. Their contribution does not have to be badly needed to be valid, but on the other hand it should arise from real need.

When an institution or organization is in this kind of partnership with groups in training whose objective is to produce something, it is because they recognize their ability to be productive, to work. This recognition sets up a favourable climate for learning that then avoids the drift into production for pedagogical reasons, where simulation predominates.

These orders from society, with their clear constraints of time and expected performance that must be defined through the technical aids that they require (workshops for reading, writing, investigation, oral expression), and because everyone has to be included, give meaning, in the short term during the training period, to a real work project.

We have only recently begun to accept orders from the public. Here are two examples:

- a request for articles about the content of their training for a magazine (MEDIATEC) was sent to a group of reading trainees. These articles were intended to sensitize a larger public to training;

- an association that planned to open a documentary resource centre asked trainees to draw up a list of documents that they, non-readers, would like to find in such a place.

Conclusion

Since its creation and the setting-up of the APP, the AFER association, owing to its growth and the recognized area of intervention that it has been able to ensure, has started to become institutionalized.

Specialists in institutional analysis have shown that institutionalization means the end of looking to the future, that is to say the abandonment of the movement's initial "revolutionary" project, even if this abandonment is not always obvious and is accompanied by a simulation of achievement intended to make it acceptable to participants. (It is symptomatic that there are so many discussions on the meaning of the association today. When such a need is felt to reflect on meaning, it is because there is no longer much left!)

There is a great danger today that we will conform to institutional training frameworks in the name of recognized technological approaches, to the detriment, even abandonment, of innovation and our original ideology.

Our action in combating illiteracy cannot make an abstraction of an ideological and political choice. The problem of illiteracy goes far beyond the context of "pedagogism" and mere technical responses:

> A society only produces the number of readers it requires. It is only by changing itself that it creates conditions for new ways of sharing. An action to promote reading begins with changes in social interactions to make people responsible in their work, their leisure and their social life. A living group is a reading group, not the reverse.[4]

Our society has changed and developed over the last fifteen years. The alternative projects of the 1970s and the ideologies they derived from, no longer meet the need. Political organizations and the union movement are disintegrating, new forms of solidarity are being created, and new forms of exclusion as well ....

How, at a time when in France the question of exclusion is appearing in an ever more crucial - and more insidious - way than it was fifteen years ago (the discussions at the time centred on opening the psychiatric hospitals, today there are growing "ghettos" of long-term unemployed), can we remain consistent with the founding purpose of our association: "to offer training choices that are an alternative to exclusion"?

The answers that we can provide to this question are vital for us today, because institutional analysis has shown that in the long run, in a process of institutionalization, the only way to avoid the inherent contradiction in this process is for the organization to dissolve itself.

We have tried to respond by "restructuring" our association, but realize that this may at most bring about a better structural organization.

It is no longer possible for us to rely only on the technical skills and equipment we possess today and on the good management of our association. We must ask why we exist, and take part in the "political debates" that are shaking up our society, and in this way try to rediscover the dynamic we had throughout our history and which we believe allowed us to develop responses in the field of training adapted to combating all forms of exclusion.

We believe that the struggle against illiteracy and all forms of exclusion is not a rearguard action, quite the contrary, and we intend to be able to continue to play a part. We will provide ourselves with the means.

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BASIC EDUCATION IN FLANDERS: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Gunter Gehre
Catholic University
Leuven, Belgium

1. Introduction

For the Flemish literacy movements, the year 1990 marked a high point in two respects. First, the United Nations proclaimed International Literacy Year, and a temporary office was set up in Flanders for the occasion to co-ordinate the many activities. The commission of International Literacy Year experts also entrusted the office with publishing a White Paper. The White Paper[1] contains various opinions concerning the approaches that should be adopted to combat illiteracy effectively in Flanders.

At the same time, there was a quickening of the pace in the political arena. After a process spanning several years, the *Vlaamse Raad* (Flemish Council) issued a decree[2] "concerning the organization of basic education for adults with little schooling." The decree profoundly changed the landscape in which the structures for educating adults with little schooling were to operate. Literacy activities were also caught up in this movement. These activities (in this case collective teaching of reading and writing skills) found themselves incorporated into larger structures.

This paper was written in the context of this evolution. First, we sketch a brief history of literacy activities to date. Given the substantial changes on this part of the education map, we must seriously rethink the literacy activities themselves. We try to situate these activities (which are part of basic education) within the whole set of social and educational structures. On the basis of several specific examples of co-operation, we try to define the relationship between "literacy training" and assistance to underprivileged groups.

While acknowledging that this new constellation offers many different ways of approaching the campaign against illiteracy in a more integrated manner, we will point out the dangers and shortcomings of the current regulations.

The following paper was written from two viewpoints. To begin with, I was for several years closely associated with various aspects of literacy promotion activities. During this period, I involved myself in the specific activities of teaching reading and writing skills collectively, but I also had to deal with various questions of a political nature that antedated the regulation of basic education. Subsequently, I have continued to follow the whole evolution, although from a certain distance. This allows me to observe and comment dispassionately on the processes at work.

2. Literacy Training and Basic Education

Origins[3]

Literacy movements did not spring up in Flanders until the late 1970s. Until that time (even after that time in the case of some people), it was thought that compulsory education, which dates back to 1914, was a sufficient guarantee against illiteracy. So illiteracy was an unsuspected phenomenon in Flanders in 1978, and it was thought that every citizen was naturally capable of reading and writing. But the situation in the Belgian Army, where reading and writing lessons had been introduced in the 1950s, and in the social assistance sector, showed that "being able to read and write" was for many Flemings not nearly so foregone a conclusion as public opinion assumed it was. The result was an enormous taboo concerning this shortcoming in a person's abilities.

Literacy initiatives sprang up throughout Flanders, beginning in 1978. In most cases, these initiatives developed out of existing assistance and training structures that from the beginning could provide the material and logistic support which these initiatives required. It is striking to note that these initiatives also involved social assistance structures, although this is not so surprising when one considers that the need for this kind of activity often makes itself felt by these institutions first. From the beginning, definite efforts were made to combine training and assistance.

The *centra voor maatschappelijk werk* (social work centres), *centra voor geestelijke gezondheidszorg* (mental health care centres) and others thus formed the foundation on which the various centres developed. Most of the centres consequently gained greater autonomy

over the years without ever completely abandoning the idea of combining training and assistance.

Literacy promotion activities grew by leaps and bounds in Flanders between 1978 and 1988. By 1986, Flanders had 46 literacy projects with 377 reading and writing groups and a total of almost 2,000 course participants. The association called *Alfabetisering Vlaanderen* (Flanders Literacy Promotion) co-ordinated these various initiatives, providing support, doing preparatory work, and defending their interests. The number of people working in these movements also grew very quickly, as well as the subsidies which the Flemish public authorities provided to the movements. But the public authorities' contribution remained insufficient, and it took a decree in 1990 before the assistance they provided grew to any appreciable size.

Parallel to these developments in literacy promotion activities, the early 1980s saw the appearance of numerous other initiatives aimed at people with little schooling. The *Opniew Gaan Leren* (Learning Again) initiative, for example, was designed to brush up basic knowledge picked up at school. There was also *Tweedekansonderwijs* (Second Chance Education) for adults who wanted to gain a lower or upper secondary education diploma. Problems with integrating immigrants gave rise to a wide range of language courses among the associations active in this area. Toward the late 1980s at least, these courses also received strong encouragement from the public authorities. Finally, special funds for assisting underprivileged groups also made it possible to set up numerous training projects for people with little schooling.

It is a fact that the services available for adults with little schooling were scattered and poorly co-ordinated at the end of 1989. This resulted in a lack of uniformity and numerous problems concerning pathways, orientation, correspondence between programs, and so on.

The idea of better co-ordinating the range of initiatives aimed at adults with little schooling and of developing an integrated, consistent offer of services dates back before 1990. As early as 1985, the initial outline had been drawn of a concept that was subsequently to serve as a model for the Basic Education Centres. In the early 1980s, a *Platformoverleg Basiseducatie* (Basic Education Platform) was introduced, and it gave rise to five independent projects called *Experimenten Basiseducatie* (Basic Education

Experiments) in five different locations in Flanders. These experiments were organized and supported by the *Vlaams Centrum voor Volksontwikkeling* (Flemish Popular Education Centre). For five years, there were experiments with contents, methods, management structures and co-operation agreements. But these five experiments had no monopoly on innovation or development in the field of literacy promotion activities. Other initiatives, including *Alfabetisering Vlaanderen* (Flanders Literacy Promotion), made constant efforts to innovate, especially in the areas of methodological evolution and skills development.

The experimentation phase ended at the beginning of 1990, and work began on a decree. As an analysis of the major thrusts of this document indicates, the decree ultimately reflected the model that emerged from the Flemish Popular Education Centre's experiments.

A decree for basic education

On June 28, 1990, the *Vlaamse Raad* (Flemish Council) adopted the decree concerning basic education. The decree covers three aspects of literacy promotion:

- organization of local activities at Basic Education Centres,
- creation of a support structure in the form of the Flemish Basic Education Assistance Centre, and
- creation of an advisory body called the Basic Education Council.

We will discuss these three aspects without describing them in too much detail.

The Basic Education Centres

There are currently 28 centres operating in the Flemish region. Each of these centres is responsible for organizing a coherent menu of educational activities for adults with little schooling (meaning people who have reached the age of majority without obtaining a recognized lower secondary education certificate). These activities are centred on teaching basic Dutch and basic mathematics, improving social skills, and promoting social orientation and integration. The centres can also develop guidance and organizational activities, which are supposed to encourage participants to take part in other kinds of activities by making them aware of learning and training issues.

Basic education has also become professionalized, in both its educational duties and administrative activities. The size of the staff at the centres ranges from a single employee to teams of 33 educational workers in a city like Antwerp.

A centre is eligible for official recognition if it offers at least 6,000 participant hours, calculated by multiplying the number of participants by the number of hours of training they have received. Under this arrangement, the centre gets a minimum staff allowance of one educational worker post and half an administrative worker post, and the staff allowance increases with every additional block of 4,000 participant hours.

The decree therefore regulates financial assistance. But it also calls for contributions from the communes in which the centres operate. The communes are expected, for example, to supply premises for the centres. And there are, of course, other funding possibilities.

Each centre is a non-profit association with a governing body made up of people from varied backgrounds. Both the general assembly and the board of governors contain representatives of various sectors: socio-cultural work, social promotion education, *Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling* (Flemish Employment Office) vocational training, the commune, the Public Social Assistance Centre, and socio-educational work.

The Flemish Basic Education Assistance Centre

An assistance centre has been set up to support basic education in the Flemish Community. This centre is responsible for supervising the planning of the centres, developing material, improving the qualifications of the teaching staff and directors, ensuring the quality of the services offered, providing information, and conducting research. The centre receives all its funding from the Education Minister and, like the local centres, is a private, non-profit agency with a governing body constituted in accordance with rules laid down in the decree.

The Basic Education Council

The council provides advice to the Flemish Executive concerning official recognition of centres and the withdrawal of official recognition. It is also responsible for providing advice on desirable developments in the sector and on any preventive steps that should

be taken. The council is made up of representatives of various sectors who are appointed by the Ministers of Education, Social Assistance and the Family, Culture, and Employment. A prime requirement of the council is that it should have close contacts with the basic education sector.

Some observations

Although the decree was met with enthusiasm, and the reactions from various quarters were highly positive, observers also pointed out a few negative aspects. We list some of them here without going into too much detail.

Is literacy training really possible at the Basic Education Centres? Some critics say that basic education as it is currently designed is a one-sided activity. They therefore ask whether it is really possible to promote literacy effectively at the centres. The centres in effect treat literacy training as a purely educational strategy, whereas illiteracy is actually a much more complicated problem. By restricting the problem to its educational aspect, we lose sight of the fact that lack of education is only one of the problems that underprivileged groups experience.

The creation of a legal framework provides social recognition for this kind of activity. This social recognition has been growing stronger and stronger over the past few years, but the decree gave it formal status. Basic education will from now on be better able to justify itself as a special kind of activity in relation to other agencies and structures. Of course, this last point is not unrelated to the fact that these activities have seen the cachet of "professional work" requiring "competence" replace the old "voluntary work" label.

The decree makes basic education in Flanders the ultimate responsibility of the Minister of Education. Although this decision was deliberate - basic education as a component of adult education - it can be considered a considerable change in orientation. The reason is that basic education's entire "prehistory" was situated within the Department of Culture, in the popular education sector. One wonders whether this change in direction will entail major shifts in objectives (social emancipation), methods (consideration for the specific characteristics of participants) and autonomy. Seen in this light, basic education as a teaching structure is distinct from literacy training as a strategy for remedying a lack of education.

The transition from the "forerunners" to the Basic Education Centres was a very rapid one. In less than half a year, the entire sector underwent in-depth restructuring that involved negotiations, compromises, and so on. Locally, a great deal of what already existed could be used, and the growing pains that necessarily accompany such changes will no doubt pass quickly enough. But we started practically from scratch when it came to co-ordination, and little effort has been made to incorporate what already existed into the new methods of operation. In fact, the exercise at times looks like an attempt to settle accounts with the past. In other words, one wonders whether, in launching this new kind of activity, we will be able to use the experience accumulated over the years in the effective manner it deserves.

3. Basic Education and the Network of Social Structures

As a structure designed for people with little schooling, the Basic Education Centre is one of several structures for training and social assistance. These structures could develop into a network of agreements for co-operation. And experience seems to indicate that things are in fact moving in this direction. But we must make an important observation here. The present decree on basic education explicitly calls for co-operation only at the administrative level of an institution. Of course, the decree does tend implicitly to promote co-operation in the form of initiating joint projects. But it does not really attach much value to these except in very limited circumstances, since they are not considered eligible for subsidies. The educational aspect of a problem situation must always be isolated and translated into a centrally organized educational program of limited duration. The people who implement the program must always be educators belonging to the centre or recruited for this purpose, and the program must correspond to one of the five streams of basic education. Other forms of co-operation, such as forms of education incorporated into other problem sectors, at the moment have little chance of seeing the light of day.

We would like to examine the current possibilities for co-operation in the light of a specific example. I myself am currently a member of a board of directors involved in running a Basic Education Centre in the region of Rupel-Vaartland-Klein-Brabant. I

would like to use this example to introduce a set of possible avenues of co-operation, adding a few examples from other centres which I believe illustrate my point.

Co-operation at the administrative level

The decree spells out in detail how a Basic Education Centre's board of governors is to be composed. The decree is based not only on ideological considerations, but also and above all on some basic premises. The first premise is that basic education must be placed in the context of adult and continuing education. The second premise is that basic education has clear affinities and links with the structures of social assistance, and these it must maintain.

In practical terms, the first premise refers to socio-cultural work, social promotion education, and vocational training organized by the *Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding* (Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Office) either in the form of middle class training or in the agricultural sector. The partners to which the second premise refers are the Public Social Assistance Centre and local socio-educational work initiatives (see Table 1). The commune is also involved. Activities aimed at immigrants are not specifically mentioned, perhaps because the situation with immigrants can differ greatly from one location to another.

The preceding deals with the forms of co-operation called for by the decree on basic education. In Section 4, we will attempt to make a few observations in this regard.

Co-operation in practice

The legislators' goal was to create, through the introduction of structural co-operation, possibilities for developing effective co-operation projects. Contacts had in many cases already been made, but many centres saw new doors open. It is difficult to say after one year what the ultimate effect of these contacts will be, but we can make out a number of positive trends. Here are a few examples.

Table 1. Composition of the Board of Directors of the Basic Education Centre (BEC) in the Rupel-Flanders Region[4]

Sector represented	BEC	Flanders
Commune	3	39
Public Social Assistance Centre	3	34
Socio-educational work	1	25
Socio-cultural work	7	164
Social promotion education	2	46
Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Office: vocational training	2	33
Middle Class training	0	5
Others	0	34
Total	18	380

Co-operation with the Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Office

As part of its training programs and placement work, the Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Office is regularly called upon to help people with few qualifications, especially people who lack a number of basic skills.

This makes it possible to develop co-operation with the Basic Education Centre. At the Basic Education Centre in the Rupel region, co-operation is envisaged in the following areas:

1) The *Weerwerk* (Re-employment) program, especially orientation. After all, one of the duties of the *Weerwerk* program consultants is to get people who have been unemployed for a long time working again, through appropriate training if necessary.

2) The *Schakelprojekten* (Linkage Projects) for unemployed people with little schooling who need to be retrained. The Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Office organizes these courses itself, but perhaps pays insufficient attention to basic

skills. These could be a job for the Basic Education Centre, as preparation for "linkage" training.

3) *Impulsgebieden* (Impulse Areas) are regions in Flanders with pronounced socio-economic problems to which the public authorities allocate financial assistance for implementing certain projects. A number of these projects have an educational impact as well.

Co-operation with the social assistance sector and the socio-educational sector.
Most of the problems facing clients of the social assistance sector have an educational side to them. Socio-economic problems and a lack of education very often go hand in hand. Many projects implemented in this area try to address several aspects of the problems specific to these disadvantages in an integrated manner. But the indirect message of the legislation is that certain divisions (both artificial and otherwise) should be maintained between the various strategies likely to solve this problem.

1) Co-operation with the Public Social Assistance Centres

In a number of cases, the Public Social Assistance Centre makes an award of financial assistance contingent on participation in some form of employment project (under an arrangement called "social hiring") that gets beneficiaries working again. Many of these beneficiaries lack such basic skills as reading, writing and mathematics related to various sectors (employment, for example). Co-operation with a Basic Education Centre can in this case represent an effective form of assistance.

2) Co-operation with the socio-educational work sector

As the socio-educational work sector tries to help underprivileged groups, it must address this problem while keeping in mind its various aspects. The assistance in this case consists of training projects for young, unemployed people with little schooling which are designed to produce tangible results (building a boat, for example). Vocational training and basic education go hand in hand in this area as well. General training and social training

play an important role, as does the acquisition of basic skills and social skills.

3) Co-operation with the underprivileged groups

As part of their efforts to help underprivileged groups, the public authorities have made a fund available for specific projects put forward by the communes or the Public Social Assistance Centres. In this case as well, basic education can cover the educational aspect if the projects chosen are ones that make it possible to work effectively with underprivileged people. Most of these projects are still just getting off the ground.

4) Co-operation agreements

There are also a number of co-operation agreements concerning the reintegration into society of specific groups, such as former psychiatric patients, former detainees, people living on the margins of society, and so on. The need for basic and social skills is urgent in this area as well.

5) Co-operation with immigrant associations

Finally, co-operation with immigrant associations is expanding as well. In most cases, the accent is on Dutch courses. These courses result in a ever larger number of people in the basic education sector as a whole and could in the long run edge out the other kinds of activities.

Co-operation with Social Promotion Education

Co-operation with Social Promotion Education and Second Chance Education is still in its infancy, mainly because of the complete absence of any tradition in this area. The limited contacts established to date have been concentrated in the area of orientation, although the effectiveness of this (bilateral) orientation policy is subject to doubt. In addition, basic education in Flanders must develop its own identity in the context of general education and emphasize its distinctive characteristics. The prospect of basic education being "swallowed up" by the complex structures of general education and thus reduced to a marginal role is not unthinkable. We have yet to

fully explore the avenues for effective co-operation with the general education sector.

Co-operation with the socio-cultural work sector
Co-operation is still in its infancy in this area as well, at least as far as everyday practices are concerned. Socio-cultural work appears to be an important partner, at least in terms of numbers.

I have the impression that up until now this numerical importance has not really translated into specific co-operation initiatives. Possible avenues of co-operation are concentrated in the area of guidance, which involves encouraging participants in one kind of activity to branch out into other activities by making them aware of learning and training issues.

Orientation as a form of co-operation

The most obvious form of co-operation is orientation. Depending on the nature of an individual's needs, a variety of institutions and structures can be called upon. The important thing is to direct individuals grappling with a given problem toward the right institution, toward the institution that can solve the problem. To do this, the Basic Education Centres will have to familiarize themselves with the other services that are available and make themselves known in their turn. The other services will have to be educated and encouraged to be on the look-out for (underlying) educational needs. The Basic Education Centre will have to respond to this need by providing target-specific information and agreeing on orientation procedures with the many services that are active in the social assistance field.

A few more examples of co-operation projects

In addition to these examples of co-operation agreements involving the Basic Education Centre in the Rupel region, we would like to mention two more examples: the first because of its importance and the second as an illustration.

Co-operation with the Fourth World movement
The "generational" poor in Flanders constitute a major group of underprivileged people. Basic Education Centres offering specially

tailored educational activities cannot solve their problems. But the staff at these centres must realize that the generational poor must also be involved in efforts to address the problems caused by a lack of education and in activities aimed at helping underprivileged groups. To do this, we must think of projects that closely involve the Fourth World movement in order to develop suitable services for this category of people as well.

Projects for nomads

Several groups in our society have no fixed places of residence. It may be difficult to provide services to them in a single location for any length of time. Many education projects must necessarily be adjusted to the distinctive conditions and characteristics of the target group. The centre must show a certain degree of flexibility in continually seeking approaches that are appropriate to these groups.

The place of the literacy training process in this network

In the light of all these considerations, we believe literacy training is a component of the policy for helping underprivileged groups. The problems which these groups face are complex, and the shortcomings from which they suffer take many forms.

Although training is often considered an important tool for solving these problems, the obstacles that prevent people from becoming involved in training and taking part in courses are generally not related to education. The obstacles are very often psycho-dynamic (involving motivation), material, financial or psycho-social (involving family situations). It is precisely in these areas that most of the structures of the social assistance sector operate. But they too often encounter problems involving education, such as a lack of basic skills. This is the point where social assistance and education overlap. It is also a point that offers a chance to co-operate more intensively in helping underprivileged groups.

The relationship between social assistance and assistance for underprivileged groups is necessarily one of reciprocity, in that the two partners have their own responsibilities and make their own particular contributions. According to De Riek[5], a good method of helping people is one that emancipates them, especially if the goal is to help them in the long term. In concrete terms, this means that those who provide assistance must not limit themselves to the

specific assistance that was requested, but must look for the problems that prompted the request. This search may turn up latent or manifest problems involving education. It is important that those who provide assistance should be able to recognize and express these problems if they are to orient the client effectively.

But it can also be helpful to develop a program together, resulting in what is called "integrated training". In this situation, it is essential to tailor the educational process to the need if a lasting solution is to be found. It is also important to ensure that the individuals themselves see a connection with the original need. Using this method, many satisfactory projects could be developed with the other institutions providing assistance. The educational aspect of a problem could be addressed more effectively in its educational context. To this end, basic education can offer its experience in the fields of methodology and instruction, while social assistance creates the conditions for finding a permanent solution and providing effective support. We wish to point out once again here that much remains to be done if we are to improve guidance and attract the potential participants in basic educational activities.

4. Literacy Training in Basic Education: Strengths and Weaknesses

Having described the situation as it exists, we wish to make a number of observations. The new decree held out great promise, and the creation of the centres raised enormous expectations. But we must keep our eyes open and maintain a critical attitude. By issuing a decree to govern this sector and by precisely describing how the sector is to organize itself, we have set in motion a process of institutionalization to which many organizations and institutions fall victim. There has been regular criticism to this effect in other countries, notably the Netherlands. The Netherlands also structured its basic education a few years ago, and it is important to compare what is happening in that country to the way in which this sector is developing in Flanders. Above all, we must avoid making the same mistakes.

Let us examine the following observations one by one.

- The structures which have been put in place guarantee the sector's social integration (see above). But its integration into the whole social assistance network and the educational system has yet to be carried out in practice. Much will depend in this process on the abilities of the individuals concerned and their affinity for this kind of work, since the management structures are not always manned by field workers. Most of the managers are administrative types, and this does not always make for sufficiently dynamic programming development. In some cases, it would perhaps be a good idea to separate central management from programming (by setting up a kind of advisory working group).

- The construction of Basic Education Centres has made it possible to bring all the forces together and end the chronic dispersal of training services for adults with little schooling. But there are reasons to wonder whether this streamlining has not led us to throw the baby out with the bath water. Can we learn from the experiences of experts who have "gone down this road" before? Is it always possible to promote the development of innovations and abilities at the grassroots level? The demands on teaching staff are considerable and could stand in the way.

- Co-operation with other social sectors is possible, but is certainly not being encouraged, nor is much value being attached to it. Projects involving co-operation are vehicles for innovation, and could have dynamic effects on activities of this kind. But these projects consume a great deal of energy and time. Unless considerable value is attached to these initiatives, we believe they will not last long. The reason is that pragmatic minds will very quickly opt for consolidating the services offered (to ensure their survival), and this will result in a loss of dynamic energy.

- The decree calls for a very broad approach to the concept of "insufficient schooling" in order to offer maximum opportunities to a target group that in Flanders includes a large number of individuals, despite the increase in school attendance rates. Precisely because of this very broad approach, there is a danger

of officials adopting a system that is centred solely on target groups who are easy to reach with courses that can be offered over and over again. The immigrant population has also begun to learn about the Basic Education Centres and now quite understandably makes use of the Dutch courses which these centres offer.

We must therefore ask ourselves whether we might not ultimately lose sight of native Belgians who are illiterate and whether they will still make use of the educational services which we offer.

- The integration of basic education into the general education system raises questions about the distinctive nature of this sector and its place in the larger framework of education for adults. We will have to find points of correlation with the general education system while avoiding being absorbed by it. The risk of "assimilation into the school sector" is real, and one might wonder whether it will still be possible to organize training programs that are centred on the participants. From this viewpoint, basic education will have continually to strive to legitimize itself and prove its autonomy. The pressure from "related fields" will only increase. The employment sector will stress its need for qualified personnel, and the general education sector will try to incorporate basic education into a curriculum structure that makes it as easy as possible to transfer into the continuing education system. The social assistance sector will continue to emphasize assistance to underprivileged groups. Basic education will have to find a place of its own in this mosaic and take care to preserve its distinctiveness.

- Finally, there is the larger social project of helping underprivileged groups. To this end, basic education adds another structure, enabling us better to address this problem from several different directions. But this line of reasoning is very dangerous. There is a danger that illiteracy will be reduced in this framework to a simple educational problem that can be dealt with through appropriate courses and programs. But illiteracy's links with socio-economic problems were stressed several times during International Literacy Year. An even better way to put it would be to say that illiteracy is one aspect of the problems that

underprivileged groups experience. We can therefore mount a reasonable defence of the idea of intensive co-operation with the social assistance sector that makes it possible to develop pluralistic strategies and solutions in a co-operative framework.

5. Conclusion

The issue of the role of the community associations movement in Flanders is approached differently today. It could be said that the associations have opted for a more comfortable system with better subsidies, and that their work falls totally within the framework of the Basic Education Centres.

For the moment, the associations really exist only on paper (as registered non-profit organizations). They have effectively incorporated themselves into the centres. It is quite possible that the next step will be to give them official status as institutions.

In my view, basic education in Flanders needs, at the very least, an associations movement that addresses illiteracy in its whole social, political and economic context. We need a movement that takes up a position alongside the education system and can provide criticism.

To do this, the associations movement must treat illiteracy as a cultural and political problem. This presupposes a reorganization and a redefinition of its goals, as concerns new social movements, for example.

After the "prehistory" of basic education, the struggle against illiteracy has entered a new phase, with very different orientations. History begins with the year zero: International Literacy Year.

Notes

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LITERACY TACTICS IN THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS MOVEMENT

Jean-Paul Hautecoeur
Unesco Institute for Education
Hamburg, Germany

In the course of a few days in October, 1991, almost all the authors of the preceding studies met at Namur, Belgium, in a seminar conducted in almost closed retreat.[1] The immediate aim of the meeting was to finish the book together.

But the event was too much of a unique occasion to be summarized in a conclusion and to transform it into a jubilee celebration. Other individuals and associations participated in it. And the "authors" had not come only to add their piece to the table of contents. There was something else to be done: namely try to go beyond the particular characteristics of local and national organizations in order to give an international identity to this movemeent, to find a common ground upon which to cooperate in order to consolidate local action and initiate work at the multi-national level.[2]

Is it possible to speak of a single community organizations movement within the domain of literacy education? What can be done, as an informal international association, to strengthen this movement?

It is the research done on this issue which will be the subject of this final chapter. The first part deals simultaneously with the introduction and conclusion of the meeting: the participants, the expectations that had been formulated, and the projects that were finally decided upon. The second part is devoted to contrasting assessments of the various associations and to an analysis of the national situations within which their work is carried out. The third part goes into greater detail into the various portrayals of literacy education.

In the speeches, a number of key words can be identified which come together into clusters of meaning, attracting or repelling each other along certain directions so as to yield an overall picture of the collective action being undertaken. The whole picture, of course, is imaginary, but it does reflect experiences, real history, and a will to

new action. The cross-sectional study of the strong meanings being conveyed will be the subject of the book's conclusion.

During the seminar, Gunter Gehre pointed out the important ideological function of the community organizations movement, in contrast to government organizations. In fact, it might be that the main strategy of this movement is its search for a highly ideological position. In the meantime, its position in time and space is mainly characterized by transitoriness and movement, mobility rather than by the appropriation of the terrain, by tactical pragmatism in less charted areas rather than by full-scale offensive strategies for the universal eradication of illiteracy.

Therefore, *Alpha 92* did not offer strategies for actions to be undertaken by the community organizations movement for combating illiteracy, at least according to the authorized presentations. Rather, what was revealed consisted of local experiences, experimental efforts at association in uncharted terrain, research activities rather than programs and national "mechanisms", some good parting shots but also a good deal of self-criticism. The only common strategy of this movement seems to be its discursive, ideological, and utopian quest: to read and talk about everything in order to change everything, or to put it more modestly, to create open spaces in which words, knowledge, and symbols (i.e. writings) can be exchanged.

All, or nearly all of the authors made reference to Paulo Freire. With great power of conviction, he named the force behind this struggle the "possible dream", to be realized through cultural action in uncharted territory. José Luis Corzo also refers to Lorenzo Milani, whose pedagogy began with an inversion (subversion) of values: acknowledging the existence of illiteracy precisely where it is said not to exist, among the "uncultivated" dominant classes, particularly in the schools. Then begin with what is most urgent: the literacy education of the educators.

This is where we are at: joint, experimental cultural action, taken in partnership, in the game of the inversion of values in which a radical inversion has already taken place, namely exclusivism. The participants in the seminar left in search of a new language and other social, material and mental conditions in order to better "hear" the words and knowledge of the excluded. This conclusion of the book will, I hope, reflect the spirit and the letter of the meeting.

1. A Seminar: Beginning and End

A variety of associations

Who came to the Namur Seminar? What was the profile of the associations? Without trying to construct a scientific classification, one can for practical purposes distinguish the various associations according to their functions, their clienteles, their partners, their localities, their organization in relation to the national or regional public authorities, their messages, etc. The diversity and the marked differences among the associations will keep us from trying to reconstruct a unidimensional account and from trying to offer a uniform description of a movement made up of distinct positions and obeying no one comprehensive directive.

- There are some de facto associations that are destined for a very short, or not a very long life; all the others are registered or incorporated, and are destined to last. The "pool" of governmental and non-governmental organizations of S. Gregorio in Portugal, as well as the European network coordinated by the Centre universitaire de formation continue (CUFCO) of Angers in France, whose participating members change each year on the occasion of their meetings, are of the first type.

- While the two Portuguese associations are mostly composed of representatives from government organizations, they cannot be said to simply constitute a body which coordinates public services in which local organizations simply happen to "appear". The autonomy of the field teams is imperative, as is the case with an association which has local, individual and organizational partners. But the above two projects were created as a result of a planned decision. Once the three-year and the five-year programs are over, the budgets essentially come to an end and the associations are dissolved.

- The degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the State varies considerably. In Flanders, a network of associations which are registered as non-profit-making is entirely under the direction of a ministry. Their organization was the subject of a decree. In Belgium's French community, the network of community organizations

practically covers the whole field of literacy education, but the work status of the participants and their training come under government policy. In Ireland, as is the case with Whitfield Adult Basic Education Trust (WABET) in Scotland, autonomy is almost complete, except for some very modest subsidies. In France, Action-Formation-Etude-Recherche (AFER) is quite autonomous, even self-managed, but a large portion of its funding is derived from national "mechanisms" which are of a constraining nature. The three present Quebec associations (2 local and one provincial) are relatively autonomous like their Francophone Belgian, Irish and Scottish counterparts, but feel the pressure of a uniform national program and of extensive local and provincial educational authorities.

- To a great extent the economy of the organizations depends on the situations described above. Some of them, it seems, are comfortable, stable, "super equipped" and do not keep track of the length of international telephone communications. Others are forced to ask that calls be postponed and live below the poverty level: two examples being the Irish National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) network and La Jarnigoine in Montreal.

- There are regional or national associations which coordinate a network of local organizations, namely of local associations which offer front-line services, and which may also be associations of associations (as is the case with WABET).

- Not all the associations come under the label of literacy education, except in Portugal, where they are part of integrated development projects. None of them really do so in Scotland and Flanders, where the issue is basic education. Some of them do so to a very slight extent, as is the case with AFER where personalized training is provided. Some are a little more involved in literacy education, for example the Unité de formation Cannes-Méditerrannée (UFCM), a small training unit for everyone at all levels.

- Finally, the associations differ from each other according to the places where they intervene and their public. Their activities unfold within the communities where they work, in their own

premises or, lacking these, within public facilities made available to them by the municipalities, educational organizations, etc. Their public can be unique or varied, voluntarily heterogeneous or homogeneous, living in a "ghetto" or dispersed. But in the great majority of cases, the associations devote themselves and belong to a specific space, a neighbourhood, a unit of low rental housing, or in a social, cultural community of varying composition (women, immigrants, or young people on the one hand, a community of gypsies, a village, a segregated neighbourhood on the other).

The picture that emerges contains many contrasts, but it is far from representing all organizations which are involved in literacy education. Many original or innovative types of association were not represented at this seminar, one of its characteristics being that it was mainly Francophone, either as a language of origin of the participants or as a second language.

How were the participants selected? Mainly on the basis of two criteria: the known quality of their work and of the persons who perform it - the association's trade mark, with an emphasis on applied research and innovation - and intervention beside/outside the educational field, which also presupposes experimental activities outside the "mainstream" in the struggle against illiteracy. In addition, the participants included ideologists who are firmly engaged in the community organizations movement, and coordinators of national and international networks.

Among the thirty or so persons who were present, about fifteen of them had agreed to write, with or without my collaboration, a monograph on their field work or an article based on a research activity in which they were involved.

Expectations

Some barely visible tendencies were identifiable at the beginning even before participants had had time to introduce themselves, to come to know each other, to exchange views, to begin to draw or move away from each other, to isolate themselves and to confront each other.

- One of those tendencies has to do with the search for an "integral approach", or how an association can succeed when dealing with powerful sectors, such as the public and private sectors, while at the same time preserving its identity. The two key terms are strength and partnership. They attract each other, but what is at stake is the association's identity and autonomy. It is clear that one cannot act effectively and extend one's scope of action in isolation and with precarious means. Government spokesmen are no longer the only possible or preferred partners. When concentrating on the local and regional level, one must widen the partnership and be able to associate with powerful sectors: the economic and financial sectors, the political sector, elected municipal officials, public services, the community organizations sector, the university, etc. If what is collectively at stake is the fight against exclusivism, then one must acquire the means that are needed in order to succeed. It is of concern to the whole of society. It must do more.

- From the above two key words, strength and partnership, another set of expectations is discernible which can be expressed with the words liberty, alternative, counterbalance, specificity, and autonomy. The search for effective action, presence, and a more solid association with the various partners implies an autonomous position vis-à-vis the public authorities and the "stong powers". The question was phrased as follows: "How does one associate oneself with the public authorities and at the same time gain in autonomy"? Or: "How far can one go and still be innovative and preserve one's identity"?

- Another view is also that of a movement that is at its last gasp, and which will soon have no other choice than to integrate with the public sector or give up an overly exhausting fight. How does one resolve this dilemma? Must one continue to fight simply in order to preserve a hardly recognized association status, to defend what has been gained, and to win a political support which only assures survival? Must one do this for a cause whose results are hardly visible, when the means continue to diminish, partners cannot be found, and the fighting spirit is at its lowest ebb? Or, to put it differently, how does one win acknowledgement for the important role played by an association

movement committed to socio-cultural activities aimed at fighting poverty when these activities have been institutionalized and public investments in them have already been judged as too burdensome?

- Expectations, on the other hand, are high with respect to the practical work done in the area of literacy education. What are the means available to render students more independent and more responsible for their own learning? How does one evaluate the work done so as to be able to communicate the results in a more convincing manner? What else can be done to stimulate the mobilization and commitment of new partners? How does one link literacy education to an integrated development program? How does one break down the division between the work done on behalf of literacy and the more specific problem of education?

- For many, it is unusual to participate in an international seminar on the theme of experiments in literacy education within the community organizations movement. The event occurred at a time when many variables were shared within the international community: the growth of exclusivism, the search for strategies for intervention other than "targeted literacy education" (alphabétisation ponctuelle), the tendency towards the institutionalization of associations within the context of new legislation on basic education. Therefore, it is an opportune time to learn to discover, exchange, make known, and reflect on local experiences through a multinational and inter-personal exchange.

- A book is now in progress, actually the present group's only joint international project. How can it be used, made known, and disseminated better? But that comes later... What research activity should one undertake to further this cooperation begun within an international network of community oganizations? How can an organization such as the Unesco Institute for Education help stimulate innovation and the search for greater effectiveness in our actions?

These were the expectations of the group at the beginning of the seminar. One must realize that the agenda for the meeting was not a smorgasbord of unprecedented questions, or that the participants

did not have the spare time to organize the exchange of ideas as they wished. A great portion of the seminar was structured on the basis of the sketch contained in the table of contents: reports, comments, and questions. It was difficult to maintain a flow in the series of questions and direct answers due to the time taken up by translation. It was only at the end of the proceedings, and always on borrowed time, that it was possible to exchange more freely and to collectively seek what should be done next.

Consequences

The aim of the closing exercise was not to avoid ending the seminar with ideological discussions, but to arrive at detailed plans of action which were realistic and applicable at the local level.

We were finally able to speak of the community organizations movement as a whole if only to inquire into its unity, its consensus and the priority of joint action at the international level. Positions are varied. For some, local action should come first. Another international event is conceivable only after local work has been done to justify it. For others, this movement contains too many contradictions. On the one hand, the associations are often in competition with each other. On the other hand, they do not use the same language. And how is it to acquire greater credibility when there is a tendency to indulge in self-deprecation, thus projecting a very negative picture of literacy education?

Two minimum "undertakings" are proposed to the associations so that they may become more coherent and "improve their credit" in their transactions with public and private authorities:

- recognize that literacy education can be an end in itself, as a legitimate democratic demand of society;

- project a positive image of the work involved in literacy education and of the people one works with.

The political value of the issue is sufficiently powerful for it to be made part of local development strategies which can then be strengthened by international support: i.e., a political value derived from positive action at the local or regional level. To these possibilities for a constructive association movement one can add the

proposal for joint research for an association charter which would serve as a means of liaison between a local association, a regional or national network fighting against exclusivism, and a commitment at the international level.

Another possible initiative is the establishment of an international link between two local organizations, i.e. twinning or the association of two literacy education networks on the model of twinning between municipalities. The aim of this would be to create the conditions for inter-cultural exchanges between learners, between trainers, and between organizations which share the same willingness to escape from a condition of marginality. Two literacy education associations are now working along these lines. This project can be extended. It is expensive. How can it be financed?

As for the usefulness of creating a new and more formal network of associations, it was pointed out that several networks exist and that the exchanges between networks of community organizations could benefit from the use of existing channels. The publication *Alpha 92*, as well as the Namur seminar are an initiative of the Unesco Institute for Education, which already coordinates an international exchange network. This network overlaps the European Network for Training, Action and Research in Literacy Education as well as an international bulletin published by UNESCO (*Adult Education Information Notes*).

The group that was present consisted mainly of authors gathered around the same publishing project, and not of official representatives of national groups. This gathering represented the end of the book. It was still necessary to ensure an efficient distribution and to render it useful to associations at the local level.

It was suggested that a reading guide be prepared, based on the questions dealt with during the siminar, to ensure a more practical use of the texts within the training and learning groups. It was suggested that summaries be prepared and published in local bulletins, to facilitate distribution. It was recommended that the comments on the texts also be published in local bulletins, in order to facilitate their distribution. It was recomended that the comments on the texts also be published;[2] that this publication be made better known in Anglophone countries (published in English since 1990, it is also published in Spanish in 1992) and that possibilities for its publication in Portuguese be explored.

If promoted vigorously, the book may also serve as a powerful medium for the mobilization of the social and political partners. Excerpts could be circulated at municipal council meetings. To make profitable use of its international value at the local level, it is suggested that one of the authors be invited at organizational or training sessions.

One theme has been put forward for the next publication of *Alpha*: participatory research. How are learners to be made to participate in research?

Usually, an assembly of this type tries to adopt at least a minimum amount of organization so that it can be set up again at another place; it sets aside some time for its organization; it sets a rhythm, routines; it gets people involved. There was no follow-up to the idea of a charter for the community organizations movement, for twinning, for affirmative action, nor any other follow-up to the *Alpha* publication, except at the local level. The focus for action is mainly local.

But much was said about another book, written by "the excluded". The animators working in literacy education have passed the ball to those who were not there. In addition, it was proposed that the ideas and projects launched during the seminar be presented to the students in the associations. It is for them to decide what follow-up there should be. They already constitute an international community: one must find the means for facilitating the circulation of their writings, to create opportunities for exchanges in foreign languages, both among individuals and groups.

This is the main theme of this conclusion of the seminar. If one must still speak of strategies for the community organizations movement, one must look for them in the *conditions that must be created so that the excluded can produce real writings of their own*: creating a place where individual and collective writings can be published; making local initiatives and productions known; circulating newspapers written by students; opening a writing competition between several countries and several languages; having a bookmobile travel on an international circuit; organizing writing, speaking, visual, and musical events such as a book fair, a poetry/video/theatre festival, etc.

To stimulate expression, communication, the exchange of ideas through genuine writing which is rooted in life and not in pedagogical simulation, also presupposes that the trainers or animators are

"converted" and "sensitized". However, they can also block expression because they have the power to decide who is capable, who is authorized to write. Sessions on literacy education must be addressed to the animators-educators, as recommended by Milani. That can be done also in seminars, colloquia, through newspapers, etc.

There were, however, some dissenting voices with respect to this writing project. The "learners" are not there, we cannot decide for them. The experience of the International Literacy Year Book, put together by the "professionals", will have been a negative experience as an opportunity for "learners" to express themselves. A writing competition runs the danger of promoting its organizers rather than the unheard voices. Also, this mobilization by means of writings by the participants supposes that a lot of groundwork has been laid for all protagonists. A message which merely says that "you can write" will not do.

An *itinerary for the circulation of the writings*, for the book collection, has been arranged between Brussels, Lille, Lyon, Madrid, Québec and Edinburgh, which overlaps with the twinning between Cannes and Namur and a popular culture event.

An *applied research project on the theme of the writings produced by the "excluded"* was considered, to be supported by the Unesco Institute for Education (UIE). The coordinators of the Collectif d'alphabétisation de Bruxelles, of the Comité de liaison pour l'alphabétisation et la promotion (CLAP, Lyon) and UIE will meet to develop this research plan and seek the means for implementing it.

2. A Mixed Balance Sheet on Literacy Education

The national contexts of the work performed by the associations determine to a great extent the analysis that they produce regarding the difficulties that are encountered and the results that are obtained. Also determining are their ideologies, the ways in which they view their work and the aims of literacy education, which in turn are also linked to the history of each movement within its own particular national or regional context.

The difficulties facing the associations

In Francophone Belgium, as in Quebec, the associations reflect the condition of their own public: poverty. The evaluation made of the difficulties and limits of the work done in the area of literacy education to a great extent reflects the precarious means available for this work: personnel which is under-qualified, inexperienced, unstable, voluntary; permanent staff members who are overworked, exhausted, discouraged; the loss of the more competent people to positions that have better status and are better paid. Poverty causes not only the instability and de-activation of the personnel, but also instability in the planning of activities, forecasts, and investments. In the Namur region, an intensive mobilization campaign in the fight against illiteracy ended with the disturbing realization that it was impossible to meet the growing demand. The means were simply not there.

The difficult working conditions that are common to Quebec and Wallonia, to which one might add Ireland and the UK at the present liberal-ultra conservative political juncture, are due to different circumstances. The Walloon associations occupy almost the whole field of literacy education; they rest on a great social partnership; they are recognized by the public authorities and by the municipalities; they are part of a network of very active community organizations in the fight against poverty. Their ties to the cultural and social affairs sector serves, according to the coordinators, as a guarantee of their autonomy and the broad range of their involvement in education for the disadvantaged.

By comparison, the Quebec associations try to survive in a more adverse environment. They constitute only a small portion of the literacy education sector, often on a sub-contracting basis. Their obligatory partner is the educational system, which has the legitimate mandate for literacy education, absorbing most of the public resources allocated to it. Although recognized as adult education organizations, their autonomy in the area of education for the disadvantaged is quite limited within the framework of a single national program. They can no longer rely on a multi-purpose network of independent organizations which have not survived ten years of budgetary restrictions and general impoverishment. With some exceptions, they now have no other choice but to work for the educational system, with the advantages and negative consequences

that that entails, consequences which resemble those noted in Dutch-speaking Belgium.

In Flanders, basic education has been semi-nationalized. The associations come under a provision administered by the Education sector. The difficulties described by G. Gehre are dreadful, but the comparison with the Quebec situation renders them very similar. The inter-sectorial cooperation of local centres exists only in their boards of directors. The work on literacy education tends to be subjected to educational administration: "a problematic situation must always be isolated and be translated into an educational program of a specific duration...This danger of formalized schooling is real". This means centralized programming, distancing of "learners" (also known as "clients", as in Quebec), standardized recruitment of educators and standardization of their tasks, above all the search for profitability calculated in terms of the rate of growth of the clientele ("consolidation of supply"), and consequently the marginalization if not the abandonment of a "social" approach to literacy education, and courses that are in demand are favoured, such as second-language courses.

In the two Portuguese experiences, the main difficulties encountered by the field teams were similar due to the inter-institutional nature of the associations. Local activity is dependent on the traditions and institutions to which it is attached, traditions and ideologies which can come into conflict with each other. The local team is subjected to the hierarchical structure of the bureaucratic mechanisms, as opposed to the search for dialogic relationships in the field. But the two experiments have also demonstrated that the institutional nature of the interventions was not incompatible with local activity that was self-directed, open to a partnership with local organizations; also, that a social service can be better equipped to perform this type of intervention than adult education.

The experiment at S. Gregorio involving a gypsy community revealed some of the major cultural difficulties inherent in an intervention which cannot be isolated from the incompatible relationships between the majority and a minority which exist in society. The field team's determination and methodology were not enough to overcome this fact. The literacy education which is imposed (by all evidence) for the purpose of integration and development is seen by the gypsies as an acculturation which threatens the survival of their group. The process of change directed

from the outside has the effect of strengthening the group's solidarity, as evidenced by attitudes of "resistance to change", which are also expressions of cultural assertiveness.

This fundamentally conflictual inter-cultural parameter noted at S. Gregorio can be transposed to the inter-class relationship which separates - without always opposing - the animators and the participants in literacy-related activities. Participation cannot be forced, particularly in an educational project which generally is not a priority for the target population. The value of this participation, central in the ideology of many organizations, is not shared "naturally" by the "participants". Strategies for the channelling of the learning objectives, or even for the substitution of educational objectives by social services or actions are necesary to attract this participation. Even in this case, "the difficulty," said Omer Arrijs, "is to go beyond the stage of selling a social service or form of social assistance, in order to initiate a process of education or training for the disadvantaged".

The relationships between animators-trainers and participants-learners can be antagonistic. Francesco Azzimonti sees the role of literacy workers as a possible obstacle to the initiation and exchange of written communication. Describing their partners as incompetent, handicapped or oppressed, the trainers have declared them unfit for any written contribution which is not part of a pedagogical exercise. One gets the impression that such an environment is not considered attractive by the new pariahs! It is to be expected, therefore, that one of the main difficulties identified a bit everywhere by the literacy workers can be defined as a "problem of motivation". As in the case of gypsies or any other proletarianized minority, absence may indeed be understood as a refusal to attend for a reason, and the diagnosis made by the educators may be viewed as a denial based on a knowledge and identity of the targeted victims. "Those who are excluded do not want to come!" This is undoubtedly the main difficulty in the recent history of literacy education, a difficulty which many associations have been unable to resolve, regardless of the national context.[3]

In contrast with the Walloon and Quebec associations is the case of associations which provide a public service on the model of a private enterprise; i.e. possessing means deemed sufficient thanks to a favorable national situation (a crisis, unemployment!), thanks to a partnership with many regional organizations and, undoubtedly,

thanks to a "recognized professional expertise". The animators from AFER point to institutionalization as the special difficulty of this situation where one has put "too much water in one's wine". The contradiction between the organization's explicit objectives - autonomy, self-management, self-directed learning - and those of the partner organizations - socio-professional rehabilitation, technical training - which have determined the "specifications" turns the action in question into a sham. If the aims of the association do not change, then the appearance of the contradiction is clearly viewed as "self-dissolution". F. Gosset and D. Andreau verbally added the following sub-title to their text: "How much should we restrain our desire to develop!"

Finally, one major difficulty for many associations which intervene in an international situation characterized by the breakdown of dualistic societies and the swelling of the ranks of the excluded, is the impossibility of sustaining the objective of literacy education when the real demand is for aid or for resistance to the exasperation caused by the conditions of daily life. Olivia Oliveira concluded with the need for an active commitment within the Portuguese society in order to ensure the respect and application of the rights of man, and therefore a role of political "mediator" beyond the shantytown. At WABET, in spite of all the optimism and the priority given to the objective of community education, it was realized that a major difficulty was the dissociation of the pedagogical objective from the social objectives of the commitment to the community. At La Jarnigoine, there was reference to the strategy of giving a full expression to the voice of women. At Alpha Mons-Borinage, multiple activities in order to provide services and the political organization of the association networks involved in the fight against exclusivism was deemed inevitable. At AFER, one found it untenable to offer technical services and individualized teaching to trainers whose function (barely recognized) is on the verge of hindering collectivization and the organization of the resistance - the construction of an alternative, according to the authors - within "ghettos for people seeking long-term employment". It also happens that these questions are not raised, due to the old-fashioned militancy in the "fight against illiteracy" or to a clearly territorial professionalization of literacy education.

Thus, the national context, the position in the training market, the type of association and public, the international economic

situation (in fact a structural crisis of world capitalism) are some of the factors which reflect the range of difficulties faced by associations working in literacy education. These difficulties are part of the still encouraging list of "results" achieved by associations, albeit results which are not always those that were expected.

The results

It is a shared view that the evaluation of the results achieved in community literacy education cannot be confused with a measure of individual learning, in technical, linguistic or educational terms. Even in the Portuguese context, where complete illiteracy is very widespread and where literacy education also has this objective of educational learning (certificates are issued), "the evaluation must be made within a more comprehensive context where the scope of the results goes beyond the amount of school learning" (O. Oliveira).

Excluded from the theme of this seminar were questions pertaining to individualized learning. Most of the participants conceived their work as a search for the real conditions - in real life - conducive to communication, expression, exchange, production of meaning, identity, culture, and accepted knowledge, worthy of being shared and transmitted. Here, among many others, are two clear expressions of this:

> Without a strategy for intervention, literacy education remains an empty shell without substance, an academic task devoted to failure on all fronts. (Sylvie Roy)

> Learning is about creating knowledge (reading the world), strengthening voices that have been silenced (writing who you are) and telling others what you have discovered (reaching an audience). (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic)[4]

The individual results sought are to be found less in the process of written expression and more in the change of attitudes, in the view of the world and the involvement in concrete action for development. One loves to quote Paulo Freire: "Knowledge cannot be transfered, it is created within and through action which affects reality." The results to be looked for range from changes which are imperceptible, ordinary, and "anecdotal" regarding daily life to political organization on a much larger scale ("to theory" - Elise de

Coster) in the fight against exclusivism, in the reclaiming of democratic rights or even in the implementation of other collective models of development, thus breaking with the dominant practices (see P. Georis). Here, within these *anti-literacy education* practices operating in solidarity with the marginalized populations, one cannot apply the individualized evaluation criteria of the "dominant" model of literacy which is "functional" and which aims at "socio-vocational integration". Here is an example drawn from the conclusion of two years of field work with the Portuguese gypsies:

- make the inter-cultural relationship more solid,
- give a constructive meaning to the gypsies'demands,
- try to meet survival requirements under the best conditions,
- fight the feeling of powerlessness,
- arrange better learning conditions for the young, while aiming for greater independence,
- ensure that human rights are respected,
- work towards endogenous cultural development rather than towards integration, etc.

In this as in many other cases, writing is not listed in the priorities for action (except for the teaching of children). The objectives of intervention were redefined during the activity, by correcting the initial "errors" which were due to ethnocentrism and misunderstanding on the part of the participants. These have redefined their roles by transforming their research activity into a process of intercultural dialogue. What have been the results of two years of intensive intervention? They have been immense, even if one must start all over again!

The animators' self-evaluations apparently contain a number of discouraging observations that might be described as "culs de sac" or as an "acute awareness of dead-ends". Those who are most excluded do not attend. For those who do come and who stay, the services provided do not at all change the exclusion relationship and

even strengthen it: "Literacy education delimits and widens the gap it claims to bridge" (O. Arrijs). But in view of these generally negative results, as insurmountable as the difficulties and as unrealizable as the objectives striven for may be, given the short time available for action, many of the evaluations are still positive. A very small sign of change can have exponential effects. As conveyed in this observation by Madalena Dias:

> A large portion of the population remained passive, but it began to understand the movement...The number of those who joined exceeded the expectations of all participants. The existence of an unthought-of movement became visible. It involved other activities...It began to generate its own model of participation.

Similar observations are made by Blair Denwette in Scotland, where the strategy for implementation in the community yielded the results anticipated with respect to the involvement of individuals and local associations - "with the community" - and even in the commitment of some individuals in basic educational work - "by the community". All the associations experienced some changes which were significant, visible, observable and analyzed, which allow the objectivization of activities, the critique of prior premises, experimentation with new tactics, liaison and exchange with outside groups, the organization of larger networks of solidatry and education for the disadvantaged.

Among the conditions required for successful action, in addition to the essential principle of community participaion, many participants emphasize the importance of the time factor. The strategy of small steps at a time does not produce significant results over the short term. "Change is very slow". The work in the areas of culture, the development of language, material, geographical, symbolic exchanges in a community and the transformation of relations between a community and the outside partners supposes planning over a three, five or six-year period, as well as a permanent field team and the flexible development of the sequence of activities. For example, at S. Gregorio the field study goes on throughout the duration of the intervention. It changes with time. Its traditional pre-literacy function tends to encompass even literacy education. Observation through participation turns into a gradual beginning of a real dialogue with the community, a rare liaison, and

a vehicle for joint projects. It takes years for this approach to reverse an exclusivist relationship that took root precisely where its existence is denied: between the participants and their assistants. The desired result is to be sought in this very process of the transformation of the rules which govern the exchange.

Often, the activity is evaluated on the basis of the extent to which initial objectives are achieved. Here, the value of the activity is assessed in relation to changing objectives. The desired quality does not lie in the technique used in applying the rules of method: it lies in the degree of flexibility and malleability, in the degree to which action is adapted to circumstances (O. Oliveira). At S. Gregorio, it is surprising that the direction of change was reversed. For a long time, it was the gypsies who had to change. Faced with the so-called "resistance to change" on the part of the gypsies, the interveners changed. Beginning with a position where the desired aim was progress, they ended up with the "recognition of their human dignity", of "acceptance" and "respect" for differences, the "meeting of cultures, "bilateral information", "dialectical interrelation", and "dialogue". This radical reversal of values and of the meaning of literacy education germinated for three years. This has led to a new realization of what cultural intervention really involves: "Unless some relationships between the two cultures are changed and counteracted, they risk becoming a form of 'cultural genocide'".

Hence the force behind the argument made by Milani which was shared by many participants at the seminar: literacy education needs first to be directed at the literacy workers, otherwise they risk foisting on others their own views regarding illiteracy since their actions have the effect of reinforcing their own scornful conviction rather than changing the condition of their victims.

A final evaluation of the work done on behalf of literacy education in an organization which claims to be an alternative school for the young while integrating community action, should assess the shift that has taken place from emphasis on the nature of the results to be attained to the self-criticism that is necessary for literacy education to occur:

> The young always have urgent needs to be met in addition to literacy education. If we must identify results in our work, it must be precisely the degree to which affective and social needs have been met...The two

> most important needs continue to be work and social and loving relations, as is the case with all of us...Reading and writing continues to be the vaguest and most difficult expectation to realize. (S. Roy)

3. **Literacy in the Plural**

There are some associations which shamelessly label their "clientele" as illiterate or uneducated. It is made up of individuals who are handicapped and in need of assistance of a psychosocial, pedagogical, and therapeutic nature. Literacy education should be a special kind of intervention, in a location identified as such, conducted by personnel ranging from volunteers to re-educators and up to professional psychologists. The service provided for the development of language abilities seeks to meet the practical demands of written communication or recycling within a training program, while at the same time rehabilitating the individuals with respect to their self-image and their relationship with their immediate surroundings. One could call this type of intervention psychopedagogical.

Other associations have a more social approach. The "illiterates" are above all people who have been excluded, not handicapped but normal people who have been marginalized from the ordinary channels of social interaction. They make up the growing class of "losers" in the dual society. There, literacy is understood as an attempt at re-integration into the interaction networks at the community and socio-linguistic level as well as an attempt at multi-faceted assistance in solving some of the daily problems connected with poverty. The basic or supplemental language training is not always a front-line service. It may be combined with a whole series of "transversal" services or community activities. The typical profile of the intervener is that of a social animator possessing a different training, or even an inter-disciplinary team which also provides education for the disadvantaged.

There are some associations of a third kind, whose relationship to literacy education is more cultural than social. For these, illiteracy is mainly the ethnocentric attribute applied by the dominant institutions to the minorities and to certain proletarianized cultural groups. To rectify the proclaimed linguistic, educational and cultural "deficit", they offer experiences based on different linguistic and cultural heritages. Their actions are part of a desire to advance

minority individuals and groups rather than of a unified, often nationalistic, offensive to "fight illiteracy". These associations which work within someone else's culture tend to define their interventions as an antidote, or as a different sort of literacy education. This consists mainly in a better arrangement of the conditions for endogenous cultural expression, finding opportunities for inter-cultural communication, and for validating differences.

This triad of associations has simplified reality considerably. The associations tend, in varying degrees, to share a combination of these conceptions and practices which are also objectively based on the type(s) of public with whom they work. However, the scheme does help to identify the various positions with respect to aims, limits, and strategies of literacy education as well as with respect to their evaluation.

Within the group as a whole, the first position which views literacy education as a "specific" educational service aimed at adults who do not know how to read and write, or not very well, represents a minority of organizations. Literacy education can be viewed as an end in itself from the theoretical or legal point of view that everyone has the right to a minimum education. Its reduction to a technical intervention, however, is generally associated with the public adult education services whose vocation is to ensure this specialized and universal function, or with networks of community organizations under the control of public organizations responsible for national basic training programs.

For some, literacy education as such refers to a by-gone age. It has not yielded the expected results. It was based on an unrealistic vision of its potential and on an illusion with respect to how necessary it was, other than from the point of view of the literacy workers. The aggressive approach to the "fight against illiteracy" could only result in the consolidation of the new professional clan of literacy workers, while better sorting out the desired clientele. Moreover, in view of the doubtful results of this "primitive" mobilization (here we are speaking of the "prehistory of literacy education"), the offerings of basic education have expanded in terms of course material and learning, and it has been considerably extended to the public at numerous levels, profiles and projects. It has also lost its initial designation as literacy education by adopting a rather wide range of labels (for which a census should be taken!).

For others, work focused on writing and reading is in no way excluded, but it cannot be conducted by itself. It must be part of life as a whole and integrated into the social calendar of local communities. While literacy education is not an independent or priority need, all others needs nevertheless are related to it. The regeneration of the social space, as the identity of the individuals who live within it (poorly), is accomplished by means of this "transversal process of basic education", as described at WABET. In a comprehensive development project, linguistic training is integrated within a "broader process of social rehabilitation".

The "decompartmentalizing" of adult literacy education is particularly applicable to generations. In a community approach, prority goes to the literacy education and schooling of the young. Literacy education among mothers, after-school daycare, Saturday workshops, work with teachers, literacy work with the young "to heal injury caused by school", community activities integrating children, liaison and joint activities with youth organizations, these are just some of the examples cited which seek to link adult literacy education with that of the young generations as well as with educators in the educational system. Such contacts, contrary to professional and institutional territoriality, can sometimes generate conflict and close other doors, as seen in the example from Portugal.

For many, literacy education as part of a more comprehensive cultural, social or community action has moved from the classroom to the street, to the neighbourhood, to other associations, to places where real production takes place: it has been emancipated from the specialized educational space so as to operate "in real life". Where it is still identified with a specific place, it is called shop, home, centre, local, etc. There, it no longer exists independently, it is explicitly tied to its social context. It is open, it operates as a network, it acts in interaction with other community partners, it delegates much of its work to other local organizations. The picture that emerges is that of an exploded centre whose varied activities involving "communication" and "global expression" can in fact only develop within this multifaceted interaction and exchange.

This breaking down of barriers also affects the distinction between the tutor or trainer on the one hand, and the learner or participant on the other. They can be confused because of their social origin: they must come from the same environment, and speak the same language. One may attempt to trace the educational

distance which separates them: the interveners will be recruited on the basis of social commitment and community experience and not on the basis of "recognized competence". Some also want to view the role of learner as autonomous by acknowledging his power to self-manage his projects or the role of self-trainer, the latter being justifiable only as the facilitator of the transfer. Where these statutory distinctions are clearly rejected, the people involved in the various collective projects will be represented as actors performing multiple roles, having the same democratic rights and the same demands. Thus, one has gone from a univalent "learner" to a "participant" wearing several hats, the main difference remaining being that between permanent employee or salaried employee versus volunteer or participant who lives in a "precarious state".

This tendency to view the two sides as the same or as similiar, however, in place of the traditional dual relationship, is criticized for several reasons. It can camouflage manipulation on a massive scale; it creates an egalitarian mythology which hinders the development of needed services; it deprives professionals of their identity, of their very own language and of suitable techniques for intervention. These limits apply particularly to the purposes of literacy education in the narrow sense (learning how to write), which must be distinguished from socialization activities, as well as to the places where these activities occur which should not be confused with a "drop-in" centre. Finally, the tendency to expand literacy education is not carried to its logical conclusion.

It should be pointed out that there are many illiterate people who justify "technical" work and that the role of teachers of reading and writing is central to an integrated team. For Omer Arrijs for example, even if "the solution for us is not the same as it is in society", courses have not been given up in the literacy education centre, rather they are being developed.

One subject which generates broad consensus, in spite of the differences of contexts and tendencies evoked, is the concept of literacy education within the social process associated with education for the disadvantaged. This type of education is part of a real social space, "in real life". Therefore, it creeps into the language, into the values, in the exchanges within a local community in order to render explicit or create meaning and value, to develop the force of expression and of demands, to find new partners and attempt to open the closed spaces of those who are in seclusion. One no

longer believes in the sublime aims of "the liberation of the oppressed", not even through their imminent rehabilitation under the impetus of human rights and dignity. Experience has shown that intervention leads less to the breaking down, and more to the management of the spheres of exclusion which in fact are becoming more extensive. We all know that desired results are mitigated and deferred to the distant future. Nevertheless, action in literacy education implies the commitment of participants beyond an immediate individual interest, as is the case when professional technical services are provided. Work in the areas of language, meaning and communication opens up new possibilities for exchange and dialogue that until now were closed.

The aim of this work common to most of the actors involved in this research[5] is not integration, nor admission, nor any other social recompense promised at the end of the activity. Rather, it lies in changing the course of events or in the opening of avenues other than submission to what appears to be beyond remedy. Everyone believes that language conceals this subtle force, and that is what they are trying to develop through what is still known as literacy education.

Conclusion

The conclusions of the seminar have been presented. In this synthesis, I have attempted to describe the various types of presentation, while being careful not to ignore the differences and seeking to place the various positions within their local and national contexts. In closing, I will try to highlight once again the main tendencies of the proceedings of the associations, so that they will not be confused with strategies. These tendencies point to diachronous and synchronous changes in meaning, of movement within various groups which must be differentiated from intentional change motivated by any one strategy or line of thinking.

The initial title of the seminar has not been changed: Literacy Strategies in Community Organizations ("Stratégies d'alphabétisation dans le mouvement associatif"). It should have been changed. Community organizations are not unified, they do not have a strategy. Groups of community organizations do not seek to win the battle in the fight against illiteracy. They do not present a common

front against an imaginary enemy or against a perceived danger. They constitute small units whose main quality is undoubtedly their adaptability to local conditions, precisely where it is hardest. Their main aim is to generate solidarity, which in turn achieves its ends through the learning of a language, through dialogue, through exchange, and the development of a stronger voice.

Thus, one of the main characteristics of these heterogeneous associations is to operate differently, independently and beyond the limited territories of strong organizations. The most common distancing that is taking place is vis-à-vis the school: "It is not enough to perfect the educational model and to attach it to the extra-curricular sector: they must be transformed together on the basis of social strategies and practices" (M. Dias).

The second type of mobility consists of the transfer of specialized professional facilities towards ordinary social mechanisms in daily life. The place where the action occurs tends to be confused with "real life", with its familiar routines, and is integrated into the community calendar.

The shift implies a change in the rules of the game. The actors are polyvalent and constitute a motley group; if possible they have emerged from the "milieu", from the "ordinary world" as they say in Quebec. The principle of autonomy means that one is forced to find one's own means and discipline for self-management.

A local association overlaps with the texture of solidarity whose common locus is precisely what is marginal - i.e. a local, precarious, and repressed element which exists outside the confines of conventional social space. It gains by becoming part of a larger integrated organization, a federation, a "network". But the local action also supposes that one works in conjunction with the legitimate powers and certain strong organizations: these tactical combinations are known as "partnerships". This is something which is being eagerly sought at this time.

One does not avoid politicians, but one no longer confronts them as in the past through slogans, in close ranks or as a party. One invites them to the site, to the locale, in order to reach a pact or sign a charter (of non-aggression, of solidarity, on respect for human rights, on the right to dignity, etc.). Politicians have been displaced. In zones where exclusion exists, one looks for the means of survival, for legitimacy, for an alternative to illusory inclusion, which is sometimes intentionally refused. This is valuable both for the

economy and for culture: it is a search for other values, ranging from an attempt to make room for those suffering from repression to the establishment of toleration, indeed to be accepting in spite of everything.

Is this a new ideology? Recent history has rendered the idea of crisis commonplace, it has widened its effects, enormously widened the manpower affected, and linked things universally, things which until recently were viewed on a continental or national scale. The proletariat will not come to power, thank you! The positive values which today animate action within these associations are: solidarity for the respect and application of human rights, alternative organization for self-centered development, creation of networks for exchange in everyday life, liaison between the local and the global through the regular telephone, for want of other electronic means.

And what about literacy education? There are still many traces left of past "mechanisms", of campaigns for the eradication of illiteracy or utopias for development. Many associations also work in the pay of strong institutions which have planned continuing education as a substitute for work and for delinquency. Others have created many compartments and experimented with numerous communication tactics, speech, and exchange of knowledge, etc.

The pedagogical ideology of literacy education is no longer an area trodden by many associations or, if it is, spitefully. The "specifications" assure the "perennial" nature of these organizations, but they are too burdensome. In the area of language, as elsewhere, resistance is being organized against exclusion since these organizations have by now established for themselves a long-term presence: intercultural partnerships, "joint investigations", traveling exhibitions, theatrical occupations, radio broadcasts, concerts, writing competitions...even involving people who would never have written. The Namur Seminar ended with this call for a search for the means, the conditions, and the places for broadcasting these messages or things that need to be said more freely and in different ways.

While literacy education, the word (or its regional equivalents such as basic education, learning how to read and write etc.), has not been replaced, its techniques have been employed differently and transformed into other places and circumstances, into other actions that one would like to call open rather than the closed space of pedagogy and programs associated with basic education. Experiments are being conducted with new approaches that are less

technical and more tactical, allowing an appreciation of all the meanings associated with the tricky task of writing. There is also an attempt to reverse the usual direction of literacy education by focusing it on those who belong to the "included", particularly those doing the "including", the trainers and other employment officials.

"Can one still speak of literacy education?" asks F. Azzimonti.[6] The other sort of pedagogy practised among the excluded "but who are rich in knowledge, in experience, and history...will undoubtedly no longer be literacy education"; this is the conclusion, reached in a questioning sort of way, by O. Arrijs. "And what if literacy were to be the opposite of an isolated school?" asks tentatively S. Roy by way of conclusion, implying that a utopian sort of community organization is already being experimented with everywhere. As for J. L. Corzo, he ended by calling for more celebration in order to better reverse the austere moral atmosphere which characterizes the educational ethos at the lower levels. The research now under way in the field of culture and ordinary language is also infused with this spirit of enjoyment which animates all these current experiments in literacy education.

Notes

1. Ute Jachn was absent. Elise de Coster was replaced by Maryse Perreault.

2. A report on the Namur Seminar, entitled *Stratégies d'alphabétisation dans le mouvement associatif*, is distributed free of charge by the Unesco Institute for Education. It is in French, with a summary in English.

3. Hautecoeur, Jean-Paul. 1990. Generous Offer, Flagging Demand: The Current Paradox of Literacy. In J.P. Hautecoeur, ed. *Alpha 90* (113-132). Hamburg: Unesco Institue for Education/ Montreal: Quebec Ministry of Education.

4. "Acquiring literacy means acquiring the means of knowing ("read to understand the world", to use Freire's words), to raise one's voice after one has always kept silent (write what one is) and communicate to others what one has learned (reach a public)," M. Hamilton, R. Ivanic and D. Barton.

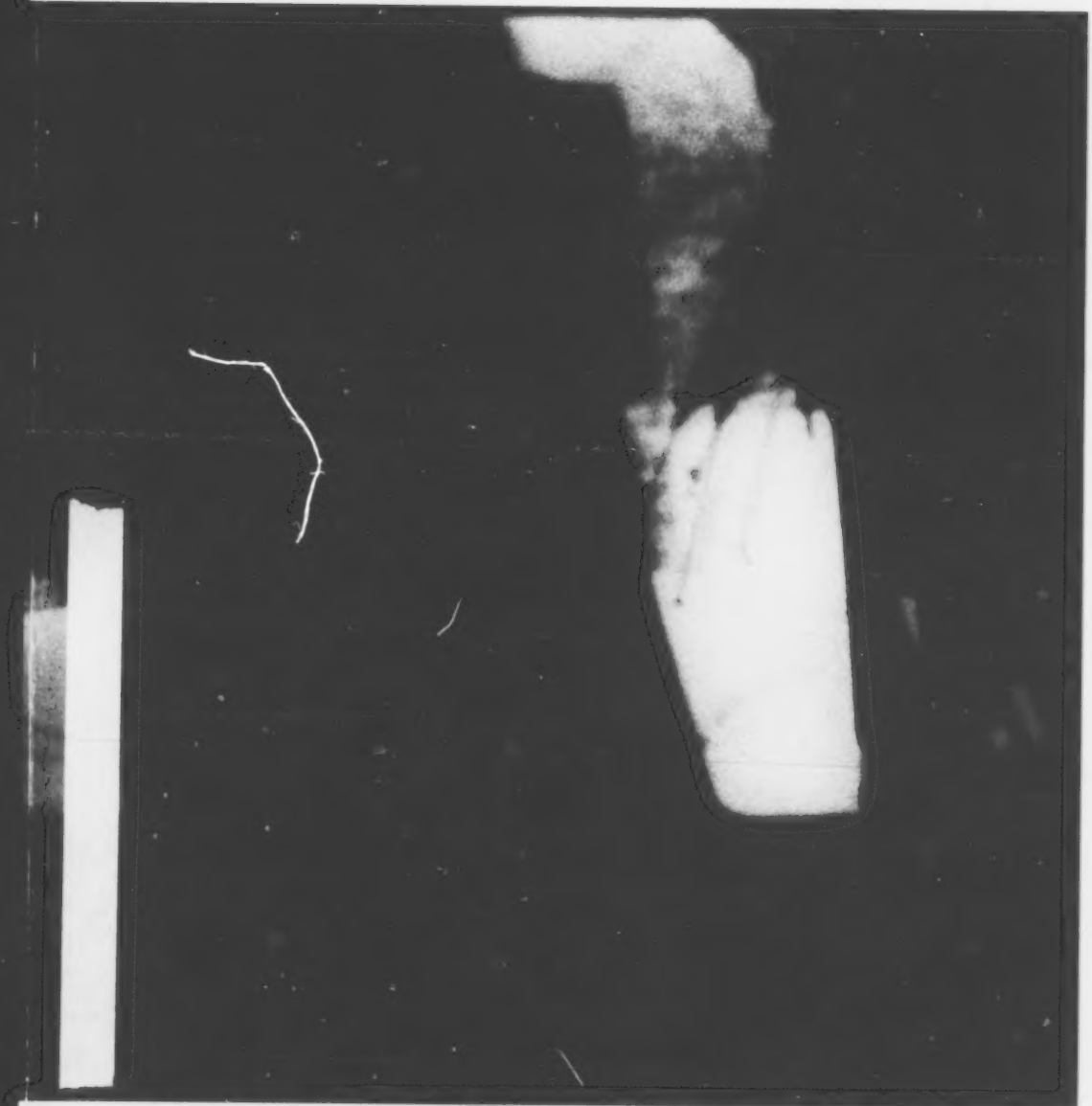
5. Hautecoeur, Jean-Paul. 1991. *Action Research in Literacy*. Ottawa: National Literacy Secretariat. (Bilingual edition, French/English).

6. Azzimonti, Francesco. 1989. L'alphabétisation éclatée. *Hommes et migrations* 1119 (Feb.): 27-32.

ALPHA 92

Recherches en alphabétisation

sous la direction de Jean-Paul Hautecoeur



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sous la direction de Jean-Paul Hautecœur

INSTITUT DE L'UNESCO
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«Les balles rouges de l'espace»,
de André Mathieu, sculpteur.

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INTRODUCTION

Jean-Paul Hautecœur

Ce nouvel ouvrage de la série *ALPHA — Recherches en alphabétisation* est le résultat d'un travail collectif de recherche coordonné par l'Institut de l'Unesco pour l'Éducation, à Hambourg. Il a été réalisé dans le cadre du programme de recherche-action de l'Institut sur les stratégies d'alphabétisation dans les pays industrialisés. Ce programme a pour objectifs le développement de la coopération intellectuelle internationale dans le domaine de l'alphabétisation des adultes, le soutien aux pratiques socio-éducatives expérimentales et la diffusion, dans les réseaux internationaux d'éducation, des résultats de ces travaux de recherche.

L'Année internationale de l'alphabétisation, 1990, aura marqué, pour beaucoup, la fin d'une histoire plutôt que le renouvellement d'un mandat dans la «lutte contre l'analphabétisme» ou l'«illettrisme». Au moins la fin d'une histoire simple, pendant laquelle on avait construit ce phénomène simplifié nommé «analphabétisme fonctionnel», contre lequel on avait monté toutes sortes d'opérations offensives, curatives ou préventives.

Heureusement, l'histoire s'est complexifiée. De rumeur, la notion d'analphabétisme s'est transformée en objet multiple, à tendances contraires, expansive ou régressive. On n'arrive pas à mesurer l'analphabétisme comme on le fait pour les accidents de la route, ou même pour les échecs scolaires. L'on ne sait pas trop qui a la compétence pour le traiter. Dans certains pays, les actions multiformes d'alphabétisation ont été canalisées vers les programmes ordinaires d'éducation permanente. Dans d'autres au contraire, le champ des actions s'est élargi à de multiples partenaires.

Pour comprendre les changements survenus dans cette histoire récente sur le plan international, il était opportun d'interroger le mouvement associatif dans plusieurs régions. Des associations avaient été à l'origine des premières actions d'alphabétisation. Ce sont des associations qui occupent encore pratiquement tout le spectre des actions actuelles. Le présent ouvrage s'est construit sur les traces de l'expérience du mouvement associatif, en partant d'une histoire locale, simple à l'origine...

En 1980, à Val-Morin, au Québec, un premier séminaire international sur l'alphabétisation populaire avait aussi été l'occasion de la première publication d'**ALPHA: ALPHA 80**. En 1991, à Namur, en Belgique, un séminaire rassemblait tous les auteurs d'**ALPHA 92** sur le thème,

analogue, du mouvement associatif en alphabétisation. Mais à part la continuité de la publication et la parenté du thème, les deux événements sont tout à fait dissemblables.

En 1980, des militants volontaristes étaient rassemblés pour créer un mouvement fort, revendicatif, sur un terrain inoccupé et presque inconnu[1]. Dix ans après, l'Année internationale de l'alphabétisation montrait combien ce thème de l'alphabétisation avait «pris» dans bon nombre de pays industrialisés, tout particulièrement en Amérique du Nord. L'alphabétisation était devenue un thème idéologique «dominant», cristallisateur de consensus social, porté par de nombreuses et diverses organisations, mais aussi déjà banalisé, et dans plusieurs pays remplacé par des préoccupations plus liées au marché économique et à l'emploi, ou intégré au vaste marché des formations.

Après le temps fort que fut l'Année internationale qui a pu consacrer le travail des organisations d'alphabétisation et également révéler les orientations actuellement dominantes, mieux marquer des marginalisations, mieux révéler les crises, où en était le mouvement autonome d'alphabétisation? Pouvait-on encore parler d'un mouvement singulier, au singulier? Vers quoi ses fonctions expérimentales et définitoires s'étaient-elles recyclées? Dans les différents contextes nationaux, quelle place occupaient les associations? Quels discours tenaient-elles maintenant sur l'alphabétisation? Avec quels partenaires s'associaient-elles ou étaient-elles prêtes à s'acoquiner? Pourquoi, pour qui travaillaient-elles? Avec quels moyens et pour quels résultats?...

Ces questions sont à l'origine d'**ALPHA 92**, dont le titre est **Stratégies d'alphabétisation dans le mouvement associatif**. Une quinzaine d'associations — de Belgique, du Québec, du Royaume-Uni, de France, d'Allemagne, du Portugal et d'Espagne — ont participé à la réalisation de cet ouvrage suivant une démarche de recherche-action, conduite localement par les personnes qui conçoivent les stratégies d'action, qui les expérimentent, qui en vivent dans tous les sens du terme.

La réalisation des ouvrages de la collection **ALPHA** avait jusqu'à maintenant été faite à distance, sans que les auteurs aient l'occasion de se rencontrer. Cette fois, nous avons eu la chance de pouvoir nous réunir pendant quelques jours, pour mettre en commun les textes, dialoguer sur les expériences, confronter les principales questions locales, régionales ou nationales, et chercher comment nous pouvions tirer profit à la fois de cette rencontre, de la publication et du réseau international[2] dans laquelle elle s'inscrit. (Le dernier chapitre rend compte du séminaire de Namur. Un rapport séparé sera aussi publié dans la série des Dossiers IUE de l'Institut de l'Unesco pour l'Éducation.)

L'expérience de la rencontre, pendant l'élaboration d'un ouvrage collectif comme celui-ci, s'est avérée riche à plusieurs égards. Au collectif de la table des matières s'ajoutent de nouvelles dimensions: un groupe réel, une rétroaction dialogique sur le manuscrit, des échanges qui deviennent une synthèse, des projets bilatéraux, multilatéraux; une fête, des connivences, des complicités durables; la recherche de moyens plus efficaces de diffusion de la publication ainsi que d'utilisation locale; l'appui important donné par la manifestation internationale aux hôtes de la région; le vaste réseau de partenaires qu'il a fallu constituer pour réaliser l'événement, etc.

Au total, une trentaine d'organisations ont activement collaboré à cette démarche globale de recherche-action. La table des matières était multinationale; la démarche d'ensemble a pu devenir internationale d'abord grâce au soutien du projet par l'Institut de l'Unesco de Hambourg, puis grâce à l'aide d'un nouveau réseau de collaborateurs qui confère une autre réalité à ce que nous avons nommé un «mouvement associatif» pour l'alphabétisation.

Un autre événement important a eu lieu après le séminaire de Namur: le séminaire international de l'Unesco sur l'alphabétisation dans les pays industrialisés, en décembre 1991, à Hambourg, qui visait à évaluer les changements survenus depuis 1986 (date du séminaire précédent) pour mieux déterminer les tendances fortes d'aujourd'hui et signaler les grands sujets de recherche à aborder dans les années à venir[3]. Quelques-uns des principaux thèmes mentionnés durant ce séminaire ont également été au centre des préoccupations à Namur. Il ne sera pas inutile de les présenter brièvement, puisqu'ils précisent le contexte sociopolitique international qui conditionne aujourd'hui le travail des associations.

Première grande observation: le sens de la notion d'alphabétisation a beaucoup changé. On emploie le mot de plus en plus souvent au pluriel («literacies»), pour bien signifier et faire valoir la diversité des pratiques linguistiques et culturelles entre les pays, et aussi à l'intérieur de chaque pays. Deux grandes réductions sont déplorées, puisqu'elles ont minorisé la vision plus ancienne, humaniste et critique, de l'alphabétisation comme une intervention fondamentale de justice et d'équité sociale: la réduction économiste, qui tend à utiliser l'alphabétisation aux fins techniques d'amélioration des compétences de traitement de l'information dans le secteur économique, et la réduction pédagogique, qui tend à créer un secteur autonome de formation, séparé des pratiques sociales et des échanges culturels qui donnent, pour les individus, un sens local et vécu aux faits d'alphabétisation.

Par ailleurs, le mythe socialement construit de l'analphabétisme massif, créateur d'une classe montante d'analphabètes, est dénoncé au profit d'une compréhension positive des différences de pratiques culturelles et

de compétences entre individus, au profit aussi d'actions d'éducation plurielles qui mettent en valeur les notions d'échange égal, de participation, de pluralisme culturel et de droits de l'homme.

La deuxième observation concerne les politiques. Le champ de l'alphabétisation a éclaté. Les acteurs, les organisations, les secteurs d'activités engagés dans l'alphabétisation et les formations de base sont maintenant nombreux, diversifiés, en concurrence, parfois en conflits. Deux grandes tendances vont à l'encontre de la volonté générale de collaboration entre tous ces acteurs: d'une part, l'étatisation de la formation de base, qui donne lieu à un programme uniforme mais d'accessibilité universelle; d'autre part, la privatisation du marché des formations, qui a pour effet de soumettre l'alphabétisation avant tout à la loi du profit. Les deux tendances ne sont pas incompatibles. Il arrive en effet qu'État et entreprises soient associés dans une même opération de monopolisation idéologique et économique du nouveau marché.

Dans ces contextes, la qualité des services est mise en question; les conditions de travail des professionnels ne s'améliorent pas ou même se dégradent; la participation des usagers des services (on dit aussi les «clients») se présente au négatif sous forme de contraintes, ou même d'obligation à l'inscription et de sanction en cas d'abandon; les organisations volontaires sont marginalisées, sans autre choix souvent que l'intégration dans le programme gouvernemental, la compétivité suivant les règles du marché, la sous-traitance ou, purement et simplement, la fermeture.

De nouvelles formes de contrats doivent être imaginées entre tous les partenaires de l'alphabétisation et les États, dans le cadre de nouvelles politiques culturelles qui auront à préserver le pluralisme, la participation de tous les acteurs, la qualité des services, l'équité des conditions de travail et en particulier la place des petites associations locales dans ce laboratoire permanent d'éducation, mais aussi d'action communautaire et de création culturelle qu'est l'alphabétisation. (Voir, en annexe, une charte des petites et moyennes associations — PMA — de la communauté française de Belgique.)

Dernière observation, qui concerne particulièrement la collection **ALPHA**: sur le plan de la recherche en cours, à faire et à encourager, le séminaire de Hambourg a signalé l'importance de la recherche locale, insérée dans la pratique de l'alphabétisation (recherche-action, participative), alors que l'on a surtout commandé et soutenu la recherche institutionnelle à des fins de planification, ainsi que les enquêtes statistiques de grande échelle, à budgets prohibitifs.

Le séminaire a aussi signalé l'intérêt des recherches descriptives et compréhensives sur les pratiques quotidiennes d'échange et de communication des différents groupes sociaux dans des contextes diversifiés, ainsi

que sur les différentes actions d'alphabétisation pour lesquelles des stratégies appropriées d'évaluation doivent être mises au point.

Reflétant l'activité de cette assemblée internationale, et aussi l'actualité de la nouvelle Europe multiculturelle, le séminaire de Hambourg a recommandé que soit développée la coopération Est-Ouest et Nord-Sud en matière de recherche, d'édition et de diffusion, autant pour servir les politiques nationales que les organisations locales d'alphabétisation.

À la suite de ces constats sur le présent contexte international et des volontés exprimées d'y intervenir plus efficacement, suivant des orientations qui ne reflètent pas toujours les grandes tendances et les idéologies fortes qui déterminent les politiques nationales, les questions à l'origine d'**ALPHA 92** révèlent leur actualité. Oui, le marché des formations a absorbé beaucoup d'organisations d'alphabétisation. Oui, les politiques d'éducation ont institutionnalisé et universalisé (pas partout!) les services de formation de base pour les adultes. Oui, certains États mettent largement à contribution le secteur associatif, en améliorant parfois les conditions de travail mais en alourdissant les cahiers des charges. Alors y a-t-il encore une place, et une justification, dans ce domaine (qui varie du rétréci à l'éclaté), pour des organisations autonomes, sans but lucratif, non professionnellement patentées, et par surcroît politiquement agitées?

ALPHA 92 cherche à répondre à cette question, que d'aucuns ont déjà écartée, la considérant comme anachronique et périmée, par la documentation détaillée sur des expériences locales d'alphabétisation. La plupart de ces expériences ont été menées par des professionnels engagés et passionnés, en collaboration avec leurs partenaires locaux, et qui sont à la recherche de l'aide institutionnelle ou privée qui leur garantira l'autonomie nécessaire à l'espace expérimental.

Voilà une première fonction qui justifie un soutien à long terme des associations: la recherche participative, à partir des conditions locales, de modalités d'alphabétisation qui aident des individus et des communautés à sortir de l'«échange inégal». Car c'est bien globalement par l'insertion dans des réseaux ou circuits d'échange (économique, culturel, social, symbolique, etc.) qu'on peut créer les conditions favorables à une alphabétisation réelle. Joëlle Dugailly exprimait ainsi la même idée: «On est analphabète, on le devient, on le reste en dépit des cours d'alphabétisation, parce qu'on n'est pas partie prenante des circuits de participation, de communication et d'expression culturelle et sociale, politique et économique[4]» Or, créer les conditions d'une insertion réelle dans ces circuits d'échange revient chaque fois à créer une situation expérimentale, en marge des pratiques routinières de la formation. Il faut en avoir les moyens.

Une autre fonction irremplaçable, pratiquement inévitable pour les associations qui sont intégrées dans une communauté, une localité ou un

quartier, est d'assumer les services de première nécessité: répondre aux urgences. Surtout, ici, de communication, de représentation, de liaison. Les programmes de formation linguistique et d'insertion professionnelle ne répondent pas aux demandes «sociales» de survie, alors que les marges de l'exclusion s'étendent dans tous les pays. En aval et en amont des programmes de formation, et partout ailleurs que dans l'espace restreint de l'apprentissage formalisé, il y a une grande nécessité de médiation des associations «non alignées». Or, ces services sont le plus souvent relégués dans les œuvres bénévoles ou délégués aux programmes d'emplois temporaires à très court terme. Ils sont voués pratiquement au même sort que les populations qu'ils sont censés servir: à l'exclusion.

Une troisième fonction, également incontournable, des associations qui font face quotidiennement à l'exclusion (désignée, d'après les dispositifs mis en place, par analphabétisme, illettrisme, sous-qualification, déclassement technologique, etc.) est l'expression politique des sans-voix. Cette fonction, indispensable à l'exercice d'une démocratie participative, tout particulièrement là où des conditions de vie intolérables et désespérées appellent des solutions magiques, suppose le soutien des activités d'éducation populaire qui ont pour objectif de faciliter à la base les possibilités du dialogue démocratique (un noble idéal pour l'alphabétisation!). Elle suppose aussi la création de nouveaux espaces légitimes d'expression et de négociation, difficiles à gagner sur le terrain des pouvoirs constitués. Cette ouverture à la participation politique en dehors de la structure des partis est l'un des rôles majeurs que l'on doit reconnaître aux associations qui travaillent sur ce terrain subtil de la participation, là où beaucoup de ponts ont été détruits.

L'échange symbolique, ou l'interaction culturelle/interculturelle par les voies multiples de la parole, de l'écriture, du corps, de l'image, de la musique et autres médiations technologiques, a, singulièrement, été écarté du champ laborieux de l'alphabétisation «fonctionnelle». En créant la nouvelle classe des «analphabètes», on a aussi fétichisé le code écrit et l'utilité des pratiques scripturales. Des associations travaillent en marge du sens obligatoire de l'alphabétisation, autrement, non plus avec des «analphabètes» mais avec des exclus de tous bords (des «allographes», comme les désigne Hélène Blais[5]), et non plus pour enseigner à écrire mais pour aider à dire et à transformer ce qu'il y a de plus profond, déchirant, désirable dans une trajectoire individuelle et dans une histoire collective, en trouvant le code approprié, et en créant les occasions recherchées[6]. Cette fonction culturelle/interculturelle de l'alphabétisation est assumée presque exclusivement par des PMA, mais elle est rarement reconnue et soutenue comme activité d'alphabétisation.

Le présent ouvrage a pour but de mieux faire connaître la recherche actuelle du mouvement associatif, singularisée dans les principales fonctions que nous venons d'énumérer. Ont aidé à le réaliser, outre les auteurs

et leurs associations, le Service d'alphabétisation du ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, la Direction des communications du même ministère, la coordination Lire et écrire de la Communauté française de Belgique, le Commissariat général aux relations internationales de la Communauté française de Belgique, la coordination Lire et écrire de Namur, la Fondation Roi Baudouin, le Secrétariat national à l'alphabétisation du gouvernement canadien, le Service de l'éducation permanente du ministère de l'Éducation espagnol et l'Institut de l'Unesco pour l'Éducation.

ALPHA 92 s'inscrit dans le plan de recherche-action de l'Institut de l'Unesco pour l'Éducation sur *les stratégies d'alphabétisation dans les pays industrialisés*. Le volume fait partie de la collection *ALPHA — Recherches en alphabétisation*, coéditée par le ministère de l'Éducation du Québec et l'Institut de l'Unesco pour la version originale française (traduction en anglais et en espagnol). La recherche s'inscrit dans le plan d'activités du Réseau international des spécialistes en alphabétisation, coordonné par l'Institut de l'Unesco pour l'Éducation, à Hambourg.

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NOTES

1. *ALPHA 80 — Compte-rendu du Séminaire sur l'alphabétisation populaire*, par Jean-Paul Hautecœur, Québec, ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1980.

2. Il s'agit du Réseau international des spécialistes en alphabétisation, coordonné par l'Institut de l'Unesco pour l'Éducation, dans lequel s'inscrivent ces recherches sur les stratégies d'alphabétisation dans les pays industrialisés.

3. *Dossiers IUE, International Seminar on Adult Literacy in Industrialized Countries: The Future of Literacy and the Literacy of the Future*, Hambourg, Institut de l'Unesco pour l'Éducation, 1992.

4. Joëlle Dugailly, *De l'Alpha... à l'Omega. La pratique du chef-d'œuvre en formation d'adultes*, Bruxelles, Collectif d'alphabétisation, 1991.

5. Hélène Blais, *Sur les chemins allographes. Pour une vision renouvelée de l'analphabétisme et de l'alphabétisation*, Montréal, 1992 (inédit).

6. Armand Gatti, «Mon théâtre, mes films, qu'est-ce que c'est?», *Le Monde diplomatique*, février 1992; Alain Bellet, «La riposte des exclus», *Le Monde diplomatique*, décembre 1991.

FORMATION DE BASE ET STRATÉGIE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT AUTOCENTRÉ

Pierre Georis
Centre d'information
et d'éducation populaire
Bruxelles, Belgique

Le texte qui suit s'appuie sur diverses expériences de travail réalisées en Wallonie (en Belgique) dans le secteur des activités d'insertion professionnelle pour des publics en difficulté.

La lecture des diverses monographies portant sur l'alphabétisation dans le secteur associatif provenant d'autres pays que la Belgique est convaincante: il y a réellement de nombreuses similitudes dans les expériences et les difficultés vécues. Aussi, bien que l'expérience qui fonde ce texte soit géographiquement située, il semble possible de construire un exposé dont l'essentiel est transversal à l'ensemble des situations concrètes recensées dans le présent ouvrage.

Un postulat cependant oriente le raisonnement qui va suivre: il importe d'avancer sur nos terrains propres avec des images-guides positives. Ce n'est pas innocent, et s'explique par le lieu d'où je parle.

La Wallonie, dont je viens, est une terre de vieille industrialisation, de grosses entreprises, de métiers très durs, qui ont abîmé la santé de nos parents et en ont tué plusieurs. Les conflits sociaux y ont été souvent très durs. La crise a elle aussi frappé très durement: des sous-régions entières sont véritablement sinistrées. Des années durant, l'actualité des Wallons a été la longue complainte des fermetures d'entreprises. Pendant 20 ans, l'essentiel du discours que les Wallons ont tenu sur eux-mêmes a été un discours de crise. Son avantage a été de repérer de façon de plus en plus fine les causes de ce qui nous arrivait. Il y avait donc aussi, en germe, des propositions de «sortie de crise». Mais son grand inconvénient a été de véhiculer aussi une connotation de «déclin», et donc d'engendrer chez les Wallons une image très pessimiste d'eux-mêmes et de leur avenir.

Le discours de crise est toujours là, et bien là. Mais s'installe petit à petit à ses côtés un discours sur le (re)développement. C'est un changement de point de vue assez radical, dont on est loin, bien loin, d'avoir encore repéré toutes les conséquences. Mais si l'on se dit que le «moral des troupes» est un facteur décisif pour la victoire, de toute évidence parler et entendre parler de «développement» est plus stimulant que d'entendre parler de «crise» et (éventuellement) de «résistance» (au déclin).

Aussi, l'hypothèse qui soutiendra le texte peut-elle se formuler ainsi: *la logique des nouvelles formes d'aide sociale (au rang desquelles il y a l'alphabétisation) est aussi une logique de développement économique.*

Ainsi formulée, cette hypothèse nous entraîne d'emblée sur le terrain «emploi-formation-insertion».

UN QUASI-CONSENSUS À PROPOS DE L'IMPORTANCE DE LA FORMATION

Un des faits marquants dans la gestion de la crise durant les années 1980 a été la permanence du débat «formation-emploi». Le mot clé de ce débat a sans conteste été celui d'«insertion», auquel on a le plus souvent joint le double qualificatif «sociale et professionnelle». L'alphabétisation est au cœur de ce débat, dont je voudrais brièvement discuter les termes.

C'est pour l'essentiel un constat statistique qui a fondé ce quasi-consensus. Globalement en effet, la probabilité d'être chômeur de longue durée diminue en fonction de l'élévation du diplôme. Si l'on peut adhérer à cela, il faut cependant pondérer une politique de l'emploi qui se limiterait à être politique de formation par les remarques de différents observateurs[1]. C'est en tout cas une erreur de croire qu'il y aurait un lien automatique entre la formation et l'emploi.

Certes, le jeune qui quitte l'école tôt et qui devient ouvrier n'a guère de perspective ouverte, a fortiori s'il est de sexe féminin. Mais son chômage est-il dû au fait que son niveau de formation est bas, au fait que les emplois ouvriers ont été réduits massivement, ou au fait encore que les emplois ouvriers sont occupés prioritairement par des adultes et qu'ils ne deviennent disponibles qu'au compte-gouttes, au fur et à mesure des départs à la retraite? Ou, s'il s'agit d'une femme, au fait que les emplois ouvriers sont occupés prioritairement par les hommes? Ou est-il dû au fait que le jeune a la malchance d'appartenir à une classe d'âge fort nombreuse? Ou? Ou?...

Toute analyse du chômage tend à conduire à la prudence: de très nombreux facteurs s'interpénètrent. Aussi, s'il est vrai qu'un surcroît de formation protège relativement mieux du chômage, il serait erroné de croire que la crise de l'emploi pourrait se résoudre exclusivement par la formation: à augmenter le niveau de formation de chaque citoyen, on n'a pas encore créé un seul emploi nouveau (sauf peut-être, de façon marginale, pour les formateurs). En réalité, l'effet essentiel consiste en une amélioration des compétitivités individuelles: à volume global d'emploi inchangé, un plus compétitif prend la place d'un moins compétitif.

La liaison formation-emploi ne va pas «de soi». À l'appui de ce constat, il en est d'autres:

— En moyenne, pas plus d'un travailleur sur deux occupe encore, quinze ans après son entrée dans la vie active, le métier pour lequel il a été formé[2].

— On pourrait fort bien renverser les propositions initiales et constater qu'en réalité, *il n'y a jamais eu dans l'Histoire un niveau moyen de formation aussi élevé qu'aujourd'hui*. On pourrait déduire de ce constat une proposition exactement inverse à celle que l'on entend habituellement: c'est parce que les gens sont trop formés (et ont des exigences trop grandes vis-à-vis du marché de l'emploi) qu'il y a crise de l'emploi. Cette argumentation renversée, que nous nous garderons bien de prendre à notre compte, a (par son aspect provocant) une valeur heuristique importante: elle montre que c'est erreur que d'organiser une analyse de société à partir d'un simple lien de cause à effet.

— On risque de s'engager dans une voie sans issue: vouloir à toute force accrocher le «wagon» de la formation à la «locomotive» de l'emploi.

On imaginera donc demander aux employeurs: quels sont les emplois de demain et quelles formations sont nécessaires? Exercice difficile à faire à moyen terme.

Si de telles tentatives ont déjà été faites, elles n'ont de valeur qu'à très court terme (les employeurs peuvent dire qui ils comptent engager lorsqu'un poste s'ouvre, mais ils n'ont pas le temps d'attendre alors que telle ou telle personne se forme, par exemple durant trois ans. Ils n'ont aucune idée des postes qui seront disponibles dans cinq ou dix ans. Or, si l'on veut planifier un enseignement «en rapport avec les besoins de l'économie», c'est à cette échelle qu'il faut réfléchir. En réalité, la mission est impossible. Il ne reste plus que l'«orientation-bateau»: il faut se former aux nouvelles technologies. L'individu, quant à lui, n'a plus qu'à collectionner les diplômes et les certificats les plus divers, au cas où...

En d'autres termes, s'il y a bien — du point de vue des individus — un lien entre la formation et l'emploi, une politique de formation qui à elle seule tiendrait lieu de politique de l'emploi pourrait ne consister qu'à organiser des phénomènes de «vases communicants» dans le marché de l'emploi.

Si le lien formation-emploi est pertinent du point de vue de la micro-économie (celui de l'individu), il est nettement plus difficile à établir sur le plan macro-économique. (Cela ne veut naturellement pas dire que la hausse des niveaux de formation n'a pas d'impact macro-économique. Au contraire, elle est quasiment une condition pour «rester dans la course» des technologies. Mais c'est tout simplement qu'au niveau macro-économique, le lien formation-emploi n'a pas de caractère d'automaticité; la formation ne va pas automatiquement créer de l'emploi pour tous les chômeurs.)

L'OBJECTIF DOMINANT QUE L'ON FIXE À LA FORMATION DES DEMANDEURS D'EMPLOI EST L'«INSERTION SOCIALE ET PROFESSIONNELLE»

Lorsque l'on parle d'«insertion», on accole au mot: «sociale *et* professionnelle». Il y a lieu de s'interroger sur ce lien, car il a plus valeur de postulat qu'il ne serait le résultat d'une démonstration. Au moins, peut-on justifier la liaison:

— Avoir un emploi, c'est participer à une production. C'est aussi, en contrepartie, obtenir un revenu qui permet de consommer. L'insertion comme producteur a pour corollaire l'insertion comme consommateur.

— Mais l'emploi a aussi une série d'autres fonctions qui sont indispensables à l'équilibre psychologique: l'emploi impose une structure temporelle aux individus, un rythme de vie; il permet de créer des contacts sociaux en dehors de la famille et facilite les échanges d'expériences entre individus; il rattache l'individu à des projets et des buts qui le transcendent (qui dépassent ses visées propres); il définit le statut social et l'identité des individus; il force à l'action[3].

L'emploi remplit ainsi à lui seul tellement de fonctions à la fois qu'il semble difficile d'imaginer qu'un ménage puisse être réputé «inséré socialement» sans qu'un de ses membres au moins ne soit inséré professionnellement.

Nous sommes cependant dans une société en évolution; les points de repère changent: *il n'est pas à exclure que toutes les fonctions de l'emploi puissent être remplies d'une autre façon que par l'emploi.* Il n'empêche que, faute de propositions autres que théoriques, on s'en tiendra à la thèse: il n'y a pas aujourd'hui de meilleure insertion sociale que l'insertion professionnelle. L'exclusion est le résultat de nombreuses causes, qui en outre interagissent les unes avec les autres: problèmes d'emploi, de formation, de revenus, problèmes familiaux, etc.

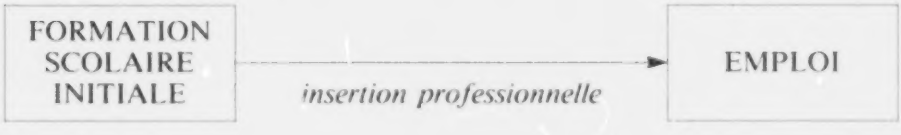
L'idéal serait de pouvoir tenir compte de tous les aspects à la fois. Mais devant la pauvreté, chaque agent est un peu comme ce photographe auquel on demande de prendre une (et une seule) photo représentative de la grand-place d'une ville ancienne. Plusieurs possibilités s'offrent à lui: prendre une photo à partir de chacune des rues qui débouchent sur la place; essayer d'avoir à la fois l'église et l'hôtel de ville, ne photographier que la façade de l'hôtel de ville, ou un détail seulement de la façade, ou encore louer un hélicoptère pour prendre une vue aérienne. Chacune de ces photos sera vraie, mais quelle que soit la photo que l'on prenne, il y aura des aspects de la place qui ne seront pas pris en considération!

Devant la pauvreté, nous sommes comme ce photographe: nous devons choisir un point de vue. Lorsque des agents parlent d'insertion sociale et professionnelle, c'est un peu comme s'ils braquaient les projecteurs sur «emploi». Apparaissent aussi dans la lumière deux éléments qui en sont proches: formation et revenus. Mais le reste sera dans l'ombre.

C'est à ce point de vue qu'adhère le présent texte.

LE PARCOURS D'INSERTION

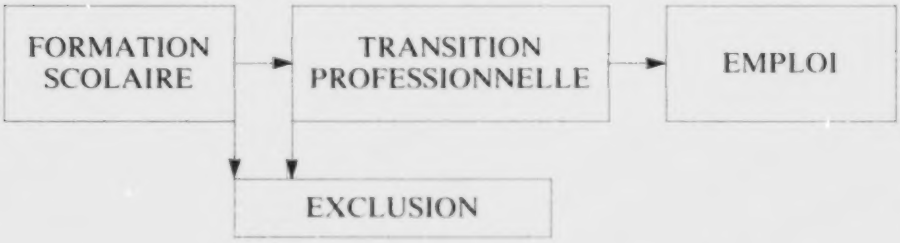
Notre société a une représentation précise du parcours d'insertion qu'elle tient pour idéal: quand l'individu termine sa formation scolaire initiale, il trouve un emploi. Il trouve une place dans la hiérarchie, qui correspond au niveau de formation atteint dans la hiérarchie scolaire. C'est un peu comme si la société était composée de deux «espaces», l'insertion professionnelle désignant le trajet d'un individu d'un espace à l'autre.



Une des manifestations de la crise est l'écart de plus en plus grand entre le nombre de demandeurs d'emplois normaux et l'offre réelle d'emplois. Cet écart engendre à son tour différents phénomènes, dont une tendance pour le jeune à ne pas trouver rapidement un emploi normal à la sortie de l'école, ou pour celui qui perd un emploi, à ne pas en retrouver facilement un autre. Un troisième espace s'intercale ainsi entre les deux premiers. On le nomme *la transition professionnelle*. C'est un espace «ni école, ni emploi»: on fait un petit travail quelques mois; on retourne en formation quelques semaines; on chôme; on a un travail à temps partiel alors qu'on le souhaiterait à temps plein; on a un mi-temps travail et un mi-temps formation. *La transition professionnelle, c'est tout ce qui n'est pas emploi normal mais qui permet de croire que toutes les portes qui*

donnent accès à un emploi normal ne sont pas verrouillées. Cette situation ne se limite pas à la primo-insertion (l'insertion qui se joue immédiatement après la scolarité), mais se répète plusieurs fois durant la vie d'un individu[4].

Une telle définition de la transition professionnelle laisse entendre que des portes peuvent être verrouillées. Le schéma doit être complété d'un quatrième espace, celui de l'exclusion, qui rassemble tous les individus ne réussissant pas à suivre un des itinéraires vers l'emploi, qu'il soit direct (de la formation initiale à l'emploi) ou indirect (à travers la transition professionnelle).



À mon sens (mais c'est un point de vue qui ne fait pas l'unanimité), l'espace des exclusions n'est pas homogène. Il regroupe trois populations:

a) Celle que l'on a pris l'habitude de nommer le «noyau dur de la pauvreté». Jadis appelé «sous-prolétariat», on le désigne assez couramment aujourd'hui du nom de «quart monde». Contrairement au prolétariat classique, le sous-prolétariat n'est pas parvenu à s'insérer dans la production, sauf de façon très ponctuelle, fort discontinue. Cela entraîne deux effets: la faiblesse des revenus (pauvreté) et la non-insertion dans les structures de défense collective des salariés.

b) De nombreux jeunes rejoignent la sphère de l'exclusion, alors que leurs parents peuvent être (ou avoir été) intégrés dans la production. Ce sont essentiellement des jeunes qui abandonnent la formation initiale sans diplôme. Jadis, ils auraient toujours pu trouver un emploi de manœuvre quelque part aujourd'hui, ils se retrouvent très démunis. Comme ils n'ont pas droit à l'allocation de chômage, leur situation est vraiment très difficile s'ils sont en conflit avec leurs parents.

c) Enfin, une série de personnes basculent de la transition professionnelle vers l'exclusion. On peut en effet être exclu du droit à l'allocation de chômage, ou être chômeur depuis si longtemps qu'il serait malvenu d'encore considérer ce statut comme de «transition» vers une profession.

On observe donc que l'espace de l'exclusion n'est pas culturellement homogène, même si on peut définir toutes les situations à partir d'un mécanisme économique: la culture quart monde n'est pas la même que celle d'un jeune qui n'a jamais travaillé ou celle de quelqu'un qui a pu jadis travailler dans un cadre normal. Les deux dernières situations relèvent de ce qu'on nomme souvent «les nouvelles pauvretés». Pour l'action, il est très important de comprendre cela: un train de mesures peut être efficace pour une partie des exclus, sans l'être pour les autres!

Ce développement induit deux orientations pour l'action:

a) Aide à l'enfant et à la famille, particulièrement en milieux populaires (écoles de devoirs, centres d'expression et de créativité, bibliothèques de rue, etc.), pour éviter le «basculement» de la formation initiale vers l'exclusion.

b) Aide aux personnes faiblement formées qui se retrouvent sans emploi:

— soit en gérant le plus efficacement possible la phase de transition professionnelle pour leur permettre l'accès à l'emploi;

— soit, lorsqu'elles se trouvent dans l'espace de l'exclusion, en prenant les mesures nécessaires pour qu'elles n'y soient pas confinées et qu'elles puissent au moins accéder à l'espace de la transition professionnelle (sinon accéder immédiatement à l'emploi)[5].

DES PRATIQUES D'ÉDUCATION POPULAIRE

Mais, nous l'avons vu, *la formation ne trouve pas son sens exclusivement par l'emploi. Il est justifié de séparer les objectifs de formation des objectifs d'emploi.* Une politique de formation vise à trouver un équilibre délicat entre la réalisation des individus et l'apprentissage de tout ce qui est nécessaire pour la vie en commun: la formation au sens strict (il y a effectivement des choses à connaître) et des aspects plus éducatifs permettant à l'individu d'être citoyen, c'est-à-dire de comprendre sa société et d'avoir les moyens d'y agir. Ainsi la démarche pédagogique est-elle un projet philosophique et éthique avant d'être un projet scientifique. On ne peut à son égard échapper à un débat sur les valeurs: quelles sont ces choses qu'il faut transmettre? Quel est l'état dans lequel devrait idéalement se trouver l'élève ou le stagiaire en formation à la fin de son parcours?

De façon générale, on peut estimer qu'il y a un consensus entre nos expériences dans le mouvement associatif pour affirmer des valeurs éthiques de type démocratique. Un «certain niveau» d'éducation: la formation est un *droit*, qui doit être identique pour tous les citoyens. Ceux qui n'y ont pas accédé dans le cadre de la scolarité doivent pouvoir utiliser durant leur vie d'autres occasions. Ce droit à la formation est conçu de manière globale, c'est-à-dire qu'il s'intéresse à la personne tout entière. De ce point de vue, on est aux antipodes d'un projet qui, estimant qu'un ouvrier assis à une chaîne et répétant huit heures par jour le même geste est «inséré», se limiterait au dressage des individus à l'exécution docile de ce seul geste. Les objectifs que nous fixons à la formation débordent largement ce dressage. Ils parlent de tout autre chose[6].

Ce consensus, pour faire bref, on peut dire que c'est celui qui anime le secteur que l'on désigne comme le secteur de l'éducation populaire (ou, parfois, de l'éducation permanente). L'alphabétisation s'inscrit pleinement dans cet esprit. Il est sans doute intéressant de réexpliquer ce concept riche, mais en définitive assez mal connu. On montrera ensuite que, complémentairement, l'alphabétisation occupe une fonction stratégique dans une politique régionale visant à l'insertion professionnelle des personnes en difficulté et, plus généralement, pour la définition collective d'une nouvelle politique de développement.

Le concept d'éducation populaire recouvre une grande diversité de pratiques de nature éducative ou d'action collective menées avec les publics populaires et sous-tendues par une éthique. Reprenons chacun de ces éléments:

a) Au départ, il y a un principe éthique, qu'il faut énoncer comme tel. Le mouvement ouvrier est une démarche volontaire de refus d'une fatalité qui fait des classes populaires en général une population exploitée et exclue de la citoyenneté active (de la possibilité de participer à la décision publique).

b) Il y a plusieurs façons de mener cette lutte qui peuvent être tout à fait complémentaires. Par exemple, l'action législative de partis politiques ou l'expression publique d'un groupe de pression. L'éducation populaire a la particularité d'être une action qui s'adresse directement aux milieux populaires eux-mêmes. À ce titre, elle est autre chose que l'action du parti ou du groupe de pression (comme l'action de telle association qui s'exprimera régulièrement au nom des consommateurs en se fondant sur les résultats d'enquêtes menées par des techniciens, mais sans avoir organisé de groupe de consommateurs). Si l'éducation populaire devient action de groupe de pression, ce sera comme résultat d'un travail avec des groupes dont on aura formulé publiquement l'expression.

c) Les pratiques d'éducation populaire sont, d'une part, de nature éducative ou pédagogique et, d'autre part, d'action collective. La grande caractéristique est le refus d'un contenu «plaqué», défini uniquement à l'extérieur des personnes intéressées. Il importe d'abord de permettre à l'individu d'avoir l'intelligence, la compréhension de sa propre expérience. À cet égard, l'individu a des problèmes précis dans une situation précise: il n'entreprend une démarche de formation que s'il est assuré de trouver réponse à ses problèmes. Le travail d'éducation populaire se fait ainsi à plusieurs niveaux: il y a l'«accroche», souvent très longue, qui nécessite la connaissance du milieu de vie (l'entreprise, le quartier, l'hôpital, etc.), repérage des problèmes concrets qui se posent aux gens, formulation d'une réponse possible à ces problèmes, vérification de ce que «l'offre» correspond bien à la «demande», aménagements éventuels.

Dans l'entreprise, le travail d'éducation populaire peut concerner, par exemple, un criant problème de sécurité; dans une cité de logements sociaux, on peut travailler à partir du coût des charges locatives; dans un quartier, ce peut être l'installation d'un feu rouge devant l'école; avec des jeunes sans travail et sans qualification, l'«accroche» sera un revenu procuré par un travail en atelier.

Les problèmes que les gens ont sont généralement vécus de façon individuelle. *Une des particularités de l'éducation populaire sera de mettre en œuvre une réponse collective, et donc de faire se rencontrer des gens qui vivent les mêmes problèmes.*

d) L'action des mouvements d'éducation populaire ne se limite cependant pas à cette «accroche», même s'il y a progrès dans le fait de réussir à créer une solidarité immédiate entre des individus qui ne réfléchissent pas spontanément sous un angle collectif.

En effet, se limiter à cette «accroche», ce peut être, dans certains cas, réussir une belle action de type «corporatiste». Respecter le principe éthique qui sous-tend l'éducation populaire, c'est un défi: *il est aussi possible de s'investir dans des actions de solidarité au profit d'autres personnes sans revendiquer d'en obtenir un avantage immédiat pour soi-même ou ses proches. Cela nécessite la perception par les personnes que la société dans laquelle elles vivent est en état de définir et de construire un projet de développement, et qu'elles peuvent y prendre une part active (être les citoyens de leur société).* Un tel projet dépasse les compétences individuelles, mais chacun doit pouvoir y trouver sa place.

Cet aspect du travail d'éducation populaire s'appuie généralement sur des dispositifs de formation plus construits, même si l'aspect contractuel reste bien présent entre les parties (on peut négocier des aménagements par rapport à l'offre)[7].

Avoir une stratégie d'éducation populaire, c'est donc travailler à faire s'emboîter des actions d'«accroche» et des actions de formation ou de solidarité plus larges, auprès de différents publics, et c'est aussi travailler à ce que les différents publics puissent trouver des terrains de rencontre. *C'est un grand enjeu.*

— Dans le syndicat, lutter contre la société duale, créer des solidarités, ce sera avoir une action avec les travailleurs qui fasse en sorte que ceux-ci ne s'enferment pas dans des revendications de nature purement corporatiste, dont l'effet peut être parfois de renforcer l'exclusion.

— Mais il est vrai aussi qu'on n'est jamais aussi bien défendu que par soi-même. Dans une série de situations, c'est l'action de groupes particuliers qui a «forcé la main» du mouvement majoritaire (si les femmes ne s'étaient pas organisées en groupes, le mouvement ouvrier aurait été moins stimulé à relayer leurs revendications contre la discrimination). La meilleure avancée possible pour le quart monde est la prise en charge de ses revendications par les organisations du mouvement ouvrier. Mais une telle prise en charge a besoin d'être «stimulée» régulièrement par les actions des «groupes quart monde» eux-mêmes.

— Il est indispensable, enfin, de trouver des terrains de rencontre. Diverses expériences laissent croire que ce n'est pas vain. Par exemple, en Belgique, des coordinations gaz-électricité ont réussi à organiser, à partir du problème précis de l'interruption de la fourniture d'énergie et d'électricité en hiver aux «mauvais payeurs», une convergence entre des allocataires sociaux, des travailleurs sociaux, des travailleurs du secteur gaz-électricité. C'est un peu le même principe, élargi, qui fait l'objet, en Wallonie, des «Forums de lutte contre la pauvreté». Les moments où ont lieu ces convergences sont des moments particulièrement «forts», même s'ils ne sont que ponctuels.

L'alphabétisation est bien une action qui relève de l'éducation populaire, en ce sens qu'elle s'adresse à des citoyens de milieux populaires, qu'elle traite un problème collectivement plutôt qu'individuellement, qu'elle ne se limite pas en réalité à un apprentissage mécanique, que l'existence même de tels groupes constitue aussi une (impressionnante) force d'interpellation du corps social, qu'elle force à une série de décloisonnements entre des secteurs qui parfois ne se rencontraient pas antérieurement (l'aide sociale, l'éducation permanente, divers représentants des pouvoirs publics, voire des représentants du monde économique)[8].

L'ALPHABÉTISATION EST UNE PIÈCE INDISPENSABLE D'UN PUZZLE COMPLEXE OU COMMENT DÉFINIR L'ALPHABÉTISATION DANS UNE STRATÉGIE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT?

Au fil de notre histoire récente, une série de programmes de formation ont été mis sur pied à l'intention des travailleurs sans emploi. On peut constater une évolution en étapes (chaque nouvelle étape n'annulant pas les programmes des étapes précédentes, il y a eu superposition du nouveau à l'ancien, qui a débouché sur un degré élevé de complexité; la complexité cependant n'est pas un vrai problème dès lors qu'il s'avère qu'il y a complémentarité plutôt que concurrence).

Décrivons les étapes de cette évolution, qui pourraient très bien s'appliquer à plusieurs pays industrialisés:

1) À une époque où le chômage n'était pas très important, il s'agissait d'utiliser les services publics de formations professionnelles pour chômeurs afin d'ajuster les compétences des demandeurs d'emploi à l'offre. Cela réussissait bien et a contribué à la diffusion de l'idée selon laquelle «une bonne formation égale un bon emploi», ou encore: «pour avoir un emploi, je dois me former». Le lien formation-emploi s'ancre dans l'opinion publique.

2) La seconde étape est celle du début de la crise. Les chômeurs, pénétrés de l'idée «la formation sera le passeport automatique vers un emploi», se pressent vers un nombre de postes de formation qui reste peu élevé. Haussant progressivement leurs critères d'accès, et écrémant donc en quelque sorte «l'élite» de leur public potentiel, les formations professionnelles continuent naturellement à pouvoir se prévaloir du taux élevé de placement de leurs stagiaires. Tous les autres, et ils sont nombreux, n'ont accès à aucun programme de formation. Cela incite le secteur des associations privées d'éducation en milieux populaires à investir le terrain avec des groupes qu'on a appelés (en culture francophone) de «mise à niveau des connaissances». Il s'agit d'organiser des cours de calcul, de langue maternelle, d'initiation à l'actualité et la vie sociale, à partir des préoccupations quotidiennes et des expériences vécues par les adultes en formation. C'est grosso modo cette mouvance qui est également à l'origine des nouvelles initiatives d'alphabétisation.

3) À peu près simultanément, on a vu se multiplier sous des formes diverses des «formations finalisées», c'est-à-dire des projets de création de petites entreprises, pour lesquels on forme des groupes de cinq à dix personnes. Il importait d'offrir une réponse aux personnes qui refluaient, essentiellement par des mises à niveau de leurs connaissances, parce que la connexion de la formation à l'emploi n'était pas suffisamment directe. Cependant,

créer de l'emploi dans des milieux qui, par définition, n'ont pas de capitaux à mobiliser est une opération extrêmement difficile, et il faut bien admettre que les succès sont d'autant plus remarquables que les échecs sont beaucoup plus nombreux que les réussites.

4) Toutes ces initiatives nécessitaient cependant que les bénéficiaires fassent une démarche volontaire vers la formation. Or, une bonne fraction des plus démunis, qui bien souvent n'ont même pas droit à l'allocation de chômage, ne sont pas demandeurs de formation. Ils sont demandeurs d'un revenu, qui leur permette de manger quotidiennement, et ils souhaitent obtenir ce revenu d'une façon plus digne que de faire la file à un guichet d'aide sociale. *Aussi, si l'on veut mener une action pédagogique qui ait quelques chances de réussite avec ce public, il faut que la formation n'ait pas les apparences de la formation mais les apparences du travail, et qu'elle procure un revenu.* C'est sur une telle hypothèse que se sont par exemple construits en Wallonie, à partir de 1984, de nombreux programmes de « formations par le travail ». Il y a beaucoup de noms pour les désigner (entreprises d'apprentissage professionnel, actions intégrées de développement, entreprises intermédiaires, écoles de production); les programmes peuvent varier dans leurs objectifs et leurs modalités. Nous ne détaillerons pas plus avant cette question dans le présent exposé. Qu'il soit retenu que malgré la diversité, une hypothèse pédagogique réunit la toute grande majorité des programmes de « formations par le travail »[9]. Bien entendu, il n'est pas rare que ces initiatives soient amenées à greffer des activités d'alphabétisation à leur entreprise. Mais elles ne se présentent pas d'emblée comme des programmes d'alphabétisation.

Il me semble cependant intéressant de constater que plus l'histoire des initiatives évolue, plus il y a de volontarisme dans le domaine de l'insertion professionnelle. Cela se manifeste de diverses manières:

— Création d'emplois totalement autofinancés par l'activité économique de différents ateliers (cela s'observe surtout dans le secteur de la construction, parfois aussi du nettoyage);

— Recherche plus systématique d'un accrochage au monde économique: contact avec des entreprises en vue du placement de jeunes; négociations pour l'organisation de formations répondant aux besoins réels des entreprises (par exemple, une chaîne de distribution alimentaire peut accepter de collaborer à la formation d'ouvriers-bouchers, qui recevront ensuite un emploi dans différentes succursales);

— Étude de filières, pour repérer des créneaux porteurs de développement et susceptibles d'accueillir des personnes faiblement

qualifiées. Exemple: on sait que les jeunes sont souvent attirés par la mécanique. On peut donc décider de monter un atelier de fabrication-réparation de vélos et de motos. Cependant, c'est un secteur où le développement de l'emploi est fort aléatoire. Par contre, la plupart des prévisions, prenant en considération le vieillissement de nos populations, le fait que celui-ci est souvent porteur de handicaps, et le fait culturel que de plus en plus les personnes souhaiteront rester autonomes le plus longtemps possible, annoncent un avenir dans le sous-secteur du matériel roulant pour les handicapés: il y a des positions à occuper, et des négociations à entreprendre, pour connecter un atelier à une mutuelle, sans que la reconversion de l'atelier moto-vélo soit une opération difficile à réaliser;

— Volonté, dans tous les cas, de contribuer à sortir les personnes intéressées des circuits de l'exclusion, en leur permettant de se raccrocher à d'autres formations débouchant sur des diplômes ou des certifications reconnues, et leur donnant de meilleures armes sur le marché de l'emploi.

Réussir, cela nécessite impérativement que nos formations pour personnes en difficulté ne soient pas elles-mêmes des ghettos. Elles doivent pouvoir s'inscrire dans un programme, si possible sous-régional, qui établisse toutes les passerelles utiles. En bref, il me semble utile:

a) de reconnaître quatre pôles dans les offres de formations pour adultes:

— alphabétisation;

— formation par le travail pour personnes en grande difficulté;

— formation de type «mise à niveau des connaissances»;

— formations finalisées (en fonction d'un projet précis de qualification professionnelle ou de la création d'activités économiques);

b) de susciter la concertation entre les pôles, afin de rendre chacun d'eux le plus efficace possible, de façon décentralisée: éviter les doubles emplois, collaborer à combler des manques, permettre aux habitants des zones rurales de bénéficier eux aussi d'offres adaptées (un des problèmes pourrait être que les groupes d'alphabétisation ne soient organisés que dans les villes, par exemple);

c) de travailler ensuite à la coordination des pôles entre eux, de telle sorte que les individus aient l'assurance de ne pas rester bloqués dans des «culs-de-sac», mais de pouvoir progresser (passer de l'alphabétisation à la «mise à niveau»; de la «mise à niveau» à une formation finalisée). Une situation désolante serait celle où l'individu, bien remotivé par son passage (son investissement) dans un groupe d'alphabétisation, ne trouve pas de possibilité de poursuivre un programme de formation, faute d'une «passerelle» vers la formation professionnelle, par exemple.

Réussir à construire un tel programme de formation, c'est permettre à des individus de se construire des *itinéraires*. Cela offre en outre la perspective de sortir des ghettos: une personne en difficulté n'est pas condamnée définitivement à passer sa vie dans des «structures marginales pour marginaux»: il lui devient possible d'accéder à une vraie qualification reconnue et certifiée, ou de se construire un projet très précis et de trouver les aides nécessaires pour le réussir. Il n'est pas à exclure que ce travail de planification débouche sur la création, commune à plusieurs organismes, de nouveaux services à la collectivité (par exemple, une agence de soutien à la création d'activités économiques).

QUELS OPÉRATEURS POUR CE PROJET DE DÉVELOPPEMENT? OU LES RAPPORTS ENTRE LES ASSOCIATIONS, LES SERVICES PUBLICS ET LES GOUVERNEMENTS

Les rapports entre les associations, les services publics et les gouvernements sont parfois (sinon souvent) difficiles. Il y a lieu de s'interroger sur ce qui constitue les lignes de tension principales. Il ne suffit pas en effet d'avoir en perspective une stratégie de développement: il faut encore des opérateurs pour la mettre en œuvre. Il est donc utile de travailler à préciser les rôles des uns et des autres. Combien de projets ne sont-ils pas paralysés par des conflits entre les organismes responsables!

LES LIGNES DE TENSION

La place qu'occupent les associations, les organismes non gouvernementaux, sur le terrain de l'alphabétisation dans plusieurs pays industrialisés est très frappante.

Dans plus d'un pays, on n'a commencé à s'occuper de l'analphabétisme que parce que des associations ont révélé la réalité d'un problème peu assumé directement par les gouvernements et les services publics. En général, le mécanisme est partout le même: des associations se mobilisent et sont amenées à traiter elles-mêmes le problème, avec peu de moyens. Si les choses évoluent favorablement, au bout de quelques années un gouvernement (peu importe qu'il soit national, régional ou local) reconnaît l'importance du problème et, dans le meilleur des cas, légifère à son sujet, c'est-à-dire que, le plus souvent, il accorde des subventions et du personnel (généralement à statut précaire) à des associations reconnues. D'une certaine façon, c'est comme si on reconnaissait que des associations pouvaient rendre des services utiles à la population, qui sont complémentaires aux services publics traditionnels. L'acte législatif soulève de grandes espérances, et il n'est pas rare de voir fleurir brusquement dans son sillage une série de nouvelles associations.

Pourtant, malgré les progrès, la situation concrète des associations promotrices reste constamment fragile. Un peu comme si les gouvernements

n'osaient jamais aller jusqu'au bout de la reconnaissance de l'utilité des services offerts par les associations.

Bien plus, après quelque temps, on observe souvent une remise en cause des associations, qui se traduit par des attaques en règle et, dans les cas les plus graves, par le démantèlement de pans entiers de l'aide publique qui leur est accordée. C'est évidemment le personnel employé dans les associations qui paye la note le plus chèrement.

En fait, le problème se présente sous un double aspect. D'abord, il y a crise des finances publiques. Le problème peut notamment se gérer par la réduction des dépenses gouvernementales. Se retrouvent plus facilement dans le collimateur les activités déléguées aux organismes non gouvernementaux, surtout s'ils ne sont pas soutenus par un lobby puissant. Relativement aux autres, le lobby des associations d'alphabétisation n'est pas le plus puissant!

Cette crise des finances de l'État a aussi des répercussions sur les différents services publics, tels les secteurs de l'enseignement et de la formation professionnelle pour travailleurs sans emploi. C'est ici que se présente le second aspect du problème: les services publics et les organisations de défense de ses travailleurs sont d'autant plus enclins à voir dans les associations des concurrents qui détournent en leur faveur des moyens publics qui devraient leur être réservés que l'inconfort s'accroît dans les écoles et les services de formation professionnelle. C'est un peu comme si, dès le moment où un problème qui n'est pas assumé par les services publics est géré par des associations qui reçoivent des subventions, les services publics se réveillaient. On attaque durement les associations, dans l'espoir de récupérer leurs moyens au profit d'un meilleur fonctionnement des services publics. Les gouvernements, qui ont des économies à faire, trouvent souvent dans ce discours une légitimité suffisante pour diminuer l'aide aux associations.

En définitive, quand des problèmes sont révélés, il y a toujours divergences de vue à propos de l'acteur qui a à traiter le problème: faut-il donner des moyens à ces associations qui sont déjà sur le terrain, ou faut-il considérer que ces associations assument en fait illégitimement des tâches qui devraient incomber aux services publics?

Il est bien difficile de donner une quelconque consigne dans ce débat sur les rôles respectifs des associations et des services publics. Il va cependant sans doute devenir plus vif encore dans la plupart de nos pays dans les prochaines années, en particulier là où les finances publiques sont en crise. À défaut de mieux, je plaiderai, dans un premier temps, pour des réflexions sur le plan local, afin de tenter la formulation d'une sorte de «pacte social», qui définirait plus clairement les complémentarités entre les différents acteurs et qui permettrait la coopération dans de nouveaux

projets menés en commun[10]. Les associations ont deux cartes au moins à jouer, au moment de la définition des « pactes sociaux locaux », qui justifient qu'elles puissent occuper une place de façon stable : d'une part, elles doivent être des « écoles de démocratie » (et sont en mesure de l'être), d'autre part, il est légitime d'affirmer qu'elles ont quelque chose à voir avec le développement économique.

L'ASSOCIATIF, CELA A QUELQUE CHOSE À VOIR AVEC LA DÉMOCRATIE

Cela peut se formuler brièvement, des développements convaincants ayant été faits ailleurs[11].

Au moins de façon implicite, l'associatif a à voir avec la démocratie.

1) *L'associatif participe au développement culturel des individus.* Parce que les associations permettent aux individus de faire concrètement l'expérience de la vie sociale, c'est par les associations qu'ils deviennent citoyens actifs, parce qu'ils s'y expriment, y apprennent à négocier, à planifier, à agir. Les associations permettent de ne pas limiter la citoyenneté à la situation de consommateur de biens ou de services. Elle prend une dimension active. Et il y a une sorte d'affirmation de ce que le développement culturel n'est pas réservé à une minorité, mais qu'au contraire, il a vocation universelle. Même si la possibilité de travail dans l'esprit de l'action de l'éducation populaire n'est nullement un monopole des associations, l'esprit associatif lui-même est au moins un facteur « facilitateur ».

2) *Bien des associations interviennent dans la lutte contre les inégalités de la vie.* Combien d'entre elles ne sont-elles pas nées d'une forme de révolte de quelques individus contre des inégalités et des injustices ! L'alphabétisation, les écoles de devoirs en milieux populaires, les groupes de défense d'un quartier, les centres de créativité, etc., sont des réponses de solidarité. Voir cela, qui se renouvelle de décennie en décennie, de génération et génération, est admirable, et fait naître l'espoir.

3) *Plus encore, les associations ont quelque chose à voir avec la démocratie politique.* La démocratie politique est un concept bien difficile à définir. Au sens strict, cela concerne la doctrine qui affirme que la souveraineté doit appartenir à l'ensemble des citoyens. La mise en œuvre du principe se heurte à une double difficulté : d'une part, associer tout le monde, tout le temps, à toutes les décisions est évidemment impossible ; d'autre part, le mécanisme de délégation temporaire de la prise de décision à des élus souffre de terribles imperfections : combien de politiciens élus démocratiquement ne finissent-ils pas par se comporter en despotes d'un autre âge ! Pas de caricature cependant : la démocratie

représentative n'est pas que cela, heureusement. Car, malgré certaines tentations qui tarabustent l'un ou l'autre élu, la presse et divers groupes de pression (malgré leurs imperfections respectives) jouent un rôle, au moins partiel, de contrepoids: un élu, en général, ne peut quand même pas tout se permettre, tout le temps.

Au cœur de ces pratiques, à bien y regarder, les associations jouent un rôle crucial. D'une certaine façon, elles se trouvent en un lieu carrefour. Elles refusent obstinément que l'activité du citoyen soit confinée au vote et qu'il soit condamné à la passivité dans les intervalles. Elles ont fonction de médiation, elles peuvent relayer des préoccupations vis-à-vis des élus. **C'est l'idée de citoyenneté qui opère le rapprochement entre l'esprit associatif et celui de l'éducation populaire.**

LES ASSOCIATIONS ONT QUELQUE CHOSE À VOIR AVEC LE DÉVELOPPEMENT ÉCONOMIQUE

Pour exprimer les choses en quelques mots: un potentiel de développement dans une région, cela ne suffit pas pour voir le développement se réaliser effectivement! Les décrets eux-mêmes ne produisent pas d'effet automatique.

Non: la condition, c'est qu'il existe une capacité de s'organiser sur le plan local, de saisir les occasions de développement présentes dans le milieu. Sans l'initiative de citoyens, aucun potentiel ne se réalise! **Or, la prise d'initiatives est de responsabilité autonome, c'est quelque chose qui s'apprend, qui doit s'exercer, s'affiner. C'est dans les associations que les citoyens font cet apprentissage.**

RENDRE EXPLICITE UNE LOGIQUE QUI N'EST ENCORE QU'IMPLICITE

Les lignes qui précèdent ont tenté de montrer qu'à la condition que les alphabétiseurs ne vivent pas en vase clos, ils pouvaient s'inscrire dans une stratégie de développement autocentré.

Cette stratégie s'appuie sur deux points:

— Les dispositifs de formation dans une région sont comme autant de pièces d'un puzzle, dont il faut construire la «figure d'ensemble». C'est l'idée d'itinéraire qui doit orienter la négociation («Des itinéraires de formation pour l'insertion sont-ils possibles pour les personnes?», «Comment installer des complémentarités?»).

— Il est parfaitement légitime, toutes choses restant égales par ailleurs, de se fixer des objectifs d'insertion professionnelle. Mais on a attiré l'attention sur le fait qu'il n'y a pas de connexion

automatique et univoque entre la formation et l'emploi. Il convient de ne pas limiter l'objectif d'une formation à un simple «accrochage» aux desiderata des entreprises. Au contraire, ce qui importe avant tout, c'est la formation de citoyens, c'est-à-dire de personnes capables de comprendre ce qui se passe autour d'elles, de se mouvoir dans le monde, d'y formuler des projets et d'entrer en négociation avec les autres pour les faire aboutir.

La stratégie dont ce texte se fait le promoteur s'inscrit donc clairement dans la philosophie de l'éducation populaire. Il est affirmé par ailleurs qu'il n'est nullement illégitime qu'à l'occasion du processus les associations revendiquent de pouvoir occuper une position plus stable, eu égard aux services éminents qu'elles rendent. Mais on n'a pas pour le moment d'autre proposition à formuler que la négociation d'un «acte social local», qui unirait les associations et les services publics à la gestion d'un projet de développement autocentré.

Réussir à faire fonctionner tout cela dans une région, ce sera aussi donner une réponse concrète à ceux qui mènent un rude débat théorique à propos de la *société duale*.

Le thème de la société duale est en effet un grand sujet de polémique dans plusieurs pays, depuis une décennie. Nombreux sont ceux qui ont observé que la société se coupait de plus en plus en deux mondes: celui des activités économiques fortes, des travailleurs protégés et des hautes rémunérations et celui des marginaux, des travailleurs des secteurs faibles et peu protégés. Naturellement, une telle coupure est inacceptable. C'est une constatation macrosociale.

Devant les diverses initiatives qui sont prises pour régler le problème (par exemple les formations par le travail), une partie des mêmes observateurs considèrent que celles-ci contribuent à renforcer la société duale, en développant de petits marchés marginaux pour marginaux.

Si le concept de société duale désigne bien un problème réel sur le plan macrosocial, quand on le ramène sur le plan microsocial, il perd son utilité, il devient une sorte de slogan facile, avec lequel on ne peut rien faire, victime d'un «effet de mode» pseudo-scientifique, un «sociologisme». Car en effet, que peut bien faire le travailleur social d'un reproche aussi vague, aussi flou, aussi définitif que: «tu fais la société duale». On reproche volontiers au travailleur social de faire un travail de façon traditionnelle, mais dès qu'il prend une initiative, on le stigmatise. Le travailleur social en est réduit à n'avoir plus rien à faire, plus rien à dire, on l'enferme dans la fatalité.

Pour éviter cet enfermement, il faut répondre:

a) La société duale que d'aucuns feignent de découvrir ne date pas d'hier. Qu'est-ce donc que le quart monde si ce n'est la société duale depuis le début de l'industrialisation?

b) Si l'on veut lutter contre la société duale, il faut que les personnes intéressées puissent se regrouper, créer de multiples solidarités, s'exprimer, bref il faut qu'il y ait des acteurs sociaux collectifs. Si ces diverses initiatives (y compris d'ailleurs des «restaurants du cœur» comme il s'en ouvre en hiver en France et en Belgique) peuvent être l'occasion de tels regroupements, elles contribuent effectivement au changement social.

c) Derrière la question de la société duale se cache un enjeu théorique et pratique majeur: *sur l'action, et dans l'action, il faut parvenir à réconcilier les points de vue macrosociaux et microsociaux.*

Le concept de développement autocentré pourrait contribuer à cette réconciliation. Non seulement, en effet, il est possible d'inscrire même de très petites opérations dans une stratégie de développement, ainsi qu'on l'a vu, mais en outre, il est frappant de constater que la logique interne de la plupart des nouvelles pratiques d'aide sociale est elle-même constituée de principes similaires à ceux que prônent les tenants du «développement économique autocentré»:

— mobilisation des ressources locales,
— pour répondre à des besoins locaux,
— tout en réfléchissant avec en tête l'idée de «filières», c'est-à-dire de complémentarité économique avec les autres activités locales.

Pour le moment, tout cela n'est qu'implicite. Le rendre explicite est un enjeu: définir une stratégie générale au cœur de laquelle même les plus petites opérations peuvent retrouver un sens, c'est aussi potentiellement pouvoir mobiliser à son profit un beaucoup plus grand nombre d'acteurs qu'actuellement[12].

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   — Pour le contact avec les actions intégrées de développement: AID, rue de la Loi, 103, 1040 Bruxelles.

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12. Ces propos sont développés de façon exhaustive dans: Pierre GEORIS, *Namur lutte contre la pauvreté. De l'aide sociale à la pratique économique*, Charleroi, Éditions alternatives wallonnes, 1988.

LA CONSTRUCTION D'UN PARTENARIAT RÉGIONAL DANS LA LUTTE CONTRE L'ILLETTRISME

André Chapotte
Françoise David
Lire et écrire
Namur, Belgique

NOTRE DÉMARCHE

«Mille neuf cent nonante, Année internationale de l'alphabétisation, le temps d'agir!»

La province de Namur a adopté cette formule de l'Unesco et s'est engagée dans la lutte contre l'analphabétisme, jouant en ce sens un rôle de pionnier au sein des pouvoirs publics belges. Sous son impulsion, une vingtaine de communes parmi les 38 qui sont sous sa tutelle ont adhéré en décembre 1990 à la Charte provinciale ou au manifeste que voici:

MANIFESTE NAMUROIS
POUR UNE CAMPAGNE D'ALPHABÉTISATION

LES AUTORITÉS DE LA COMMUNE DE .....
CONSCIENTES DU DÉFI LANCÉ PAR L'ANNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE L'ALPHABÉTISATION

DÉCIDENT, SUR LEUR TERRITOIRE,

— de mener une campagne de sensibilisation de la population;

— d'instaurer une collaboration prioritaire avec le Centre public d'aide sociale de la commune et tous les représentants de la vie associative;

— d'organiser, à la disposition des mouvements d'éducation permanente, l'infrastructure indispensable pour décentraliser leur action;

— d'organiser, seules ou avec les responsables des communes voisines, des cours proches des besoins locaux;

— de signaler aux pouvoirs national, communautaire et régional la nécessité de leur soutien permanent pour intensifier et maintenir la continuité de l'action d'alphabétisation.

Dans un contexte d'austérité qui touche l'investissement social en particulier, on peut se demander pourquoi et comment ces pouvoirs politiques régionaux et locaux, ces administrations, en arrivent à prendre position de façon aussi nette quant à leur concours auprès des mouvements d'éducation permanente contre l'analphabétisme.

Car, comme il est énoncé dans la Charte, il ne s'agit pas pour les communes signataires d'apporter un soutien symbolique mais bien de contribuer concrètement, par la fourniture de locaux, de matériel ou l'appui financier, à la réalisation d'un objectif communautaire visant à **offrir à quiconque, en deça des dix années à venir, la possibilité de suivre un cours à proximité de son domicile ou de pouvoir s'y rendre gratuitement en utilisant les transports en commun.** Il a donc fallu toucher ces pouvoirs politiques, les sensibiliser, les mettre devant les réalités de l'analphabétisme.

Comment ce partenariat s'est-il développé? Qui sont les acteurs du terrain — et de l'ombre —, les associations et les mouvements porteurs de la lutte contre l'analphabétisme dans la province? Et qui sont les analphabètes? Depuis quand s'intéresse-t-on à eux et avec quels moyens? Et enfin, combien d'années de mobilisation a-t-il fallu pour concentrer les énergies éparses autour d'un objectif communautaire? C'est ce processus d'interactions et de complémentarité locale, de collaboration intégrée entre acteurs sociaux, éducatifs, administratifs et politiques que nous allons relater ici.

CONTEXTE GÉOGRAPHIQUE DE L'ACTION

Avant de décrire la mise en place du processus d'association des énergies autour de la campagne d'alphabétisation, nous allons préciser son cadre géographique.

La province de Namur, l'une des neuf provinces belges, se situe dans le sud du pays, en zone francophone, au cœur d'une région appelée Wallonie. Rappelons que la Belgique compte trois communautés linguistiques qui sont, par ordre d'importance:

— la communauté de langue néerlandaise, dans la partie nord du pays (Flandre) et à Bruxelles;

— la communauté de langue française, dans la partie sud du pays (Wallonie) et à Bruxelles;

— la communauté de langue allemande, à l'extrême est du pays.

Chaque province représente administrativement une subdivision territoriale de l'État belge. Elle est compétente pour la gestion de tout ce qui

est d'intérêt à son niveau, par exemple la politique sociale, la santé publique, la culture, l'enseignement, les travaux publics, le développement économique et le tourisme. D'un côté, elle est soumise à l'État central, de l'autre, elle exerce un pouvoir de tutelle sur les communes situées dans son entité.

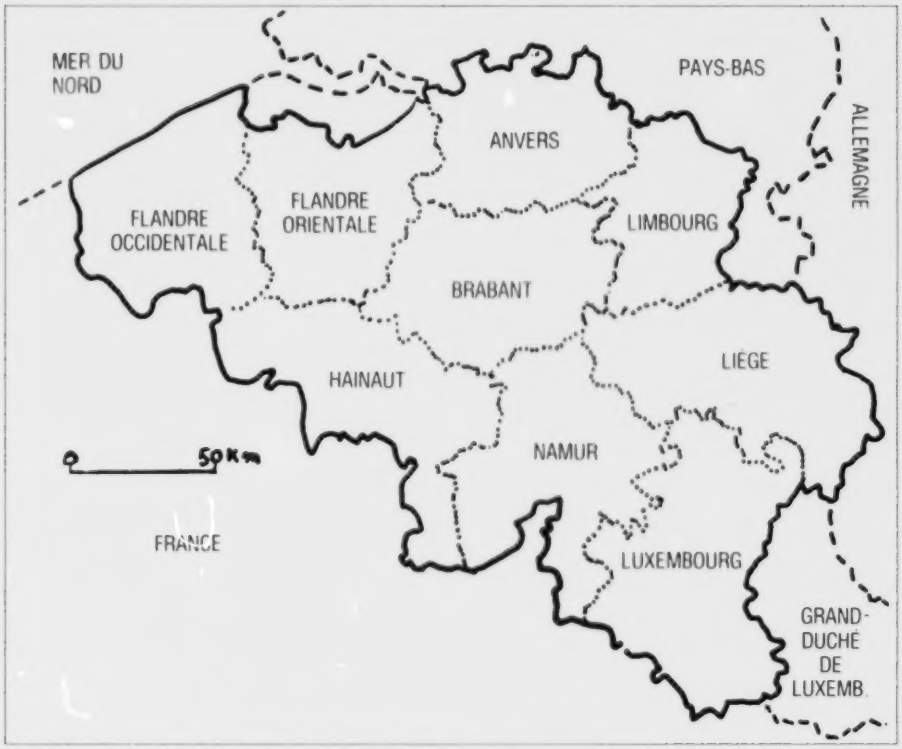


TABLEAU I: Les neuf provinces belges

Occupant une position centrale en Wallonie, la province de Namur est située au carrefour des grands axes de communication Paris-Liège, Cologne et Bruxelles-Luxembourg-Strasbourg-Bâle. Elle compte une population de 415 000 habitants, pour une superficie équivalent à 12 p. 100 du territoire belge. Sa densité de population, de 110 habitants par km^2, est relativement faible par rapport à la moyenne du territoire, trois fois plus élevée. Elle compte 38 communes, dont les plus peuplées sont: Namur, chef-lieu de province et capitale de Wallonie, avec environ 100 000 habitants; Sambreville, 28 000 habitants; Andenne, 21 000 habitants.

Ces trois communes sont situées sur une dorsale est-ouest: le sillon industriel Sambre et Meuse.

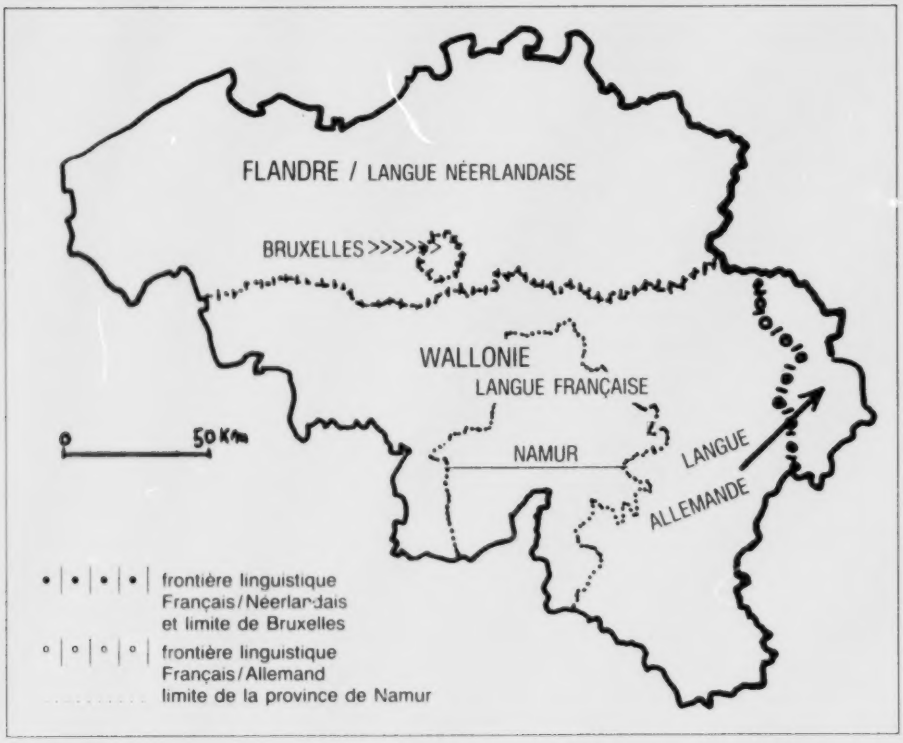


TABLEAU II: Situation de la province de Namur par rapport aux régions et aux communautés linguistiques

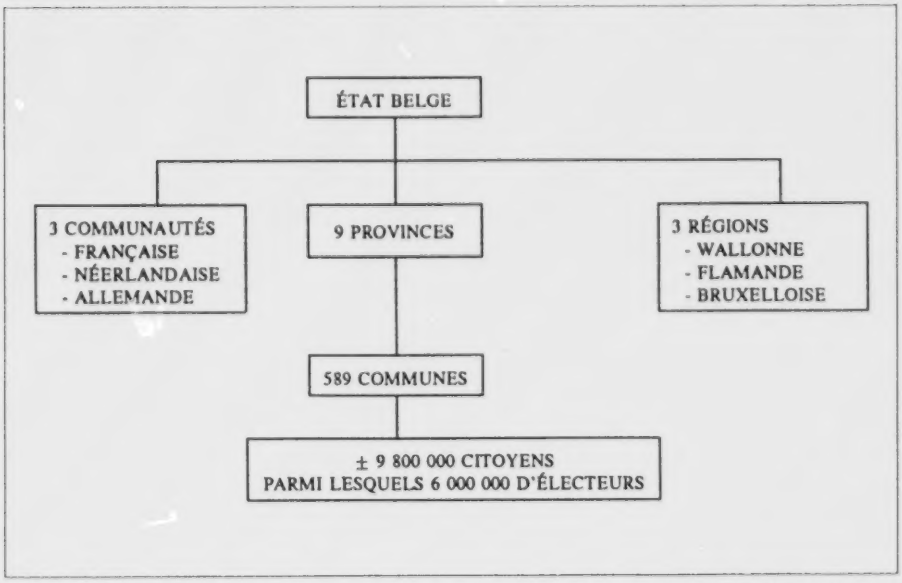


TABLEAU III: La place des provinces et communes dans la structure administrative belge

La majorité des autres communes de la province ont des chiffres de population relativement bas, ce qui indique leur caractère rural: 13 communes comptent de 5 000 à 10 000 habitants; 13 communes comptent moins de 5 000 habitants.

La structure économique et démographique de la province de Namur est donc bipolaire, avec d'un côté la dorsale industrielle et tertiaire est-ouest correspondant au sillon Sambre et Meuse, mais aussi au zoning voisin de l'autoroute de Wallonie et au chef-lieu de province: Namur, zones à forte densité de population, et, de l'autre côté, les campagnes sises au nord et au sud de cette dorsale, émaillées de quelques centres tertiaires et de nouveaux noyaux industriels, zones à population plus dispersée.

TABLEAU IV: Les 38 communes de la province de Namur

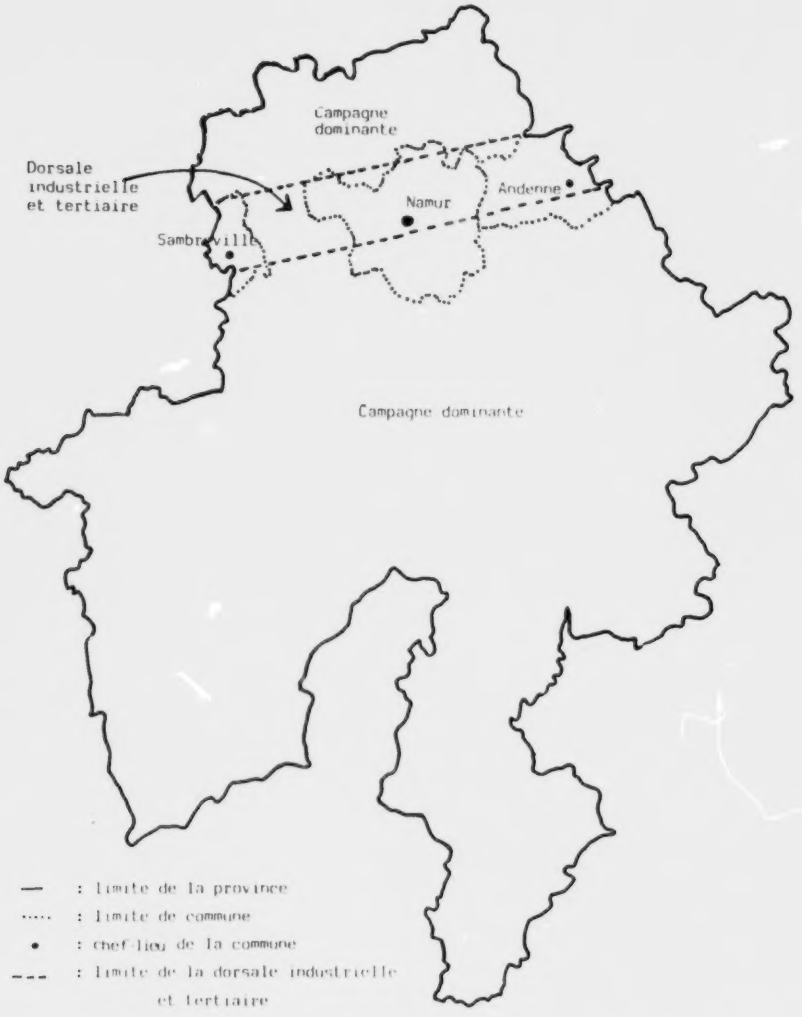


TABLEAU V: Structure économique de la province de Namur

Terrain de vieille tradition industrielle, le sillon Sambre et Meuse, à forte densité ouvrière, connut sa prospérité économique par la chimie, la verrerie, les carrières et les mines de charbon. Ces dernières fermèrent les unes après les autres dans les années 1960 et 1970, entraînant un chômage élevé de la population, parmi laquelle bon nombre d'immigrés italiens, grecs, turcs et marocains venus remplacer les Belges dans un travail malsain et dangereux auquel ceux-ci répugnaient.

La crise économique aggrava ce phénomène par restructuration et concentration des autres entreprises traditionnelles. Ces pertes d'emplois n'ont été que très partiellement épongées par la demande de main-d'œuvre

dans les nouvelles entreprises automatisées du zoning et dans les centres tertiaires en expansion de Namur.

5,5 %	secteur primaire (agriculture, extractions)
32,9 %	secteur secondaire
61,6 %	secteur tertiaire

TABLEAU VI: Répartition de l'emploi par secteurs économiques dans la province de Namur

Quant à la zone rurale qui s'étend de part et d'autre de la dorsale, elle est peuplée en majorité de travailleurs du secteur tertiaire qui travaillent à Namur, à Bruxelles ou dans des centres plus restreints. En effet, bien que l'agriculture domine le paysage de cette zone, seulement 5 p. 100 de la population de la province travaille encore dans ce secteur.

Cependant, par les liens familiaux, les traditions, le mode de pensée ambiant et le cadre de vie, la majeure partie de la population de cette zone garde son attachement aux valeurs rurales. Cette disposition d'esprit imprègne aussi, dans une certaine mesure, le chef-lieu de province qu'est Namur, ville moyenne d'environ 100 000 habitants, ceinturée par des campagnes.

L'ILLETTRISME DANS LA COMMUNAUTÉ FRANÇAISE DE BELGIQUE

Il existe chez nous des adultes qui ne savent ni lire, ni écrire, ni reconnaître les lettres; mais ils représentent une minorité par rapport à l'ensemble des personnes qui ne maîtrisent pas suffisamment la lecture et l'écriture pour comprendre le sens de ce qu'elles lisent ou pour remplir des formulaires simples.

Ces dernières ont en général fréquenté l'école plusieurs années, mais pour des raisons diverses, que nous exposerons plus loin, elles ont progressivement oublié ou rejeté leurs acquis. On parlera, pour ce qui les concerne, d'analphabétisme fonctionnel. Dans notre société urbaine, ces personnes éprouvent, à des degrés divers, des difficultés à faire face aux exigences du quotidien, comme celles-ci: lire un horaire d'autobus ou de train, chercher un numéro dans un annuaire téléphonique, lire une préparation sur un emballage alimentaire, comprendre la signalisation routière, se situer sur une carte routière ou un plan et retrouver son itinéraire, aider les enfants dans les tâches scolaires au retour de l'école, lire un contrat, une facture, la posologie d'un médicament, remplir un bulletin de virement, etc.

Ainsi l'analphabétisme fonctionnel se définit-il toujours en rapport aux exigences d'une société donnée. C'est une notion relative dépendant

des critères que l'on fixe au préalable. Tel bagage jugé suffisant dans un contexte peut apparaître nettement insuffisant dans un autre, d'où la difficulté d'évaluer pour une population donnée le seuil d'analphabétisme fonctionnel et l'extrême variabilité des chiffres avancés dans les études, enquêtes et recensements.

À ce sujet, les seules statistiques dont on dispose en Belgique proviennent de l'armée. Elles estiment le taux d'analphabétisme fonctionnel à environ 1,5 p. 100 du contingent. Ces chiffres ne prennent pas en considération ces vastes couches de la population que sont les femmes, les personnes âgées, les hommes exemptés du service militaire, les non-Belges, etc., et nous apparaissent largement sous-estimés en regard des données quantitatives des pays voisins.

Ainsi, la Grande-Bretagne avance la proportion de 13 p. 100 de jeunes adultes éprouvant des difficultés en matière d'écrit et de calcul. Ces données proviennent d'une étude statistique réalisée en 1981 sur une population âgée de 23 ans. En France, une enquête menée en 1988 pour le Groupe permanent de lutte contre l'illettrisme révèle un taux de 21,8 p. 100 pour la population adulte ayant des problèmes de lecture et d'écriture. L'INSEE avançait en juin 1989 la proportion de 9 p. 100 de personnes adultes éprouvant des difficultés graves à lire, écrire et s'exprimer oralement.

Pour aboutir à une estimation moins partielle du taux d'analphabétisme fonctionnel en Communauté française de Belgique, l'association Lire et écrire, qui coordonne la campagne d'alphabétisation, a pondéré les données de l'armée (tests subis par les miliciens), celles de l'Office national de l'emploi (sur le niveau d'études des chômeurs recensés) et celles des relevés faits dans les divers pays dont sont originaires les communautés immigrées vivant en Belgique. On aboutit ainsi à une fourchette de 300 000 à 500 000 adultes ne maîtrisant pas suffisamment l'écrit au regard des nécessités de la vie quotidienne. Cela représente une proportion comprise entre 7 et 13 p. 100 de la population et correspond aux estimations des pays voisins[1].

À une échelle plus restreinte, la province de Namur compte environ 40 000 analphabètes fonctionnels sur un total de 415 000 habitants. Parmi eux, 185 personnes ont suivi des cours d'alphabétisation en 1990. Derrière la sécheresse des chiffres, il y a l'itinéraire des personnes analphabètes et souvent leur mal-vivre. Analphabètes, pourquoi? Après bientôt cent ans d'enseignement obligatoire et gratuit!

Il n'est pas inutile de rappeler que l'ampleur de l'analphabétisme dans les pays européens s'est révélée avec la crise économique des années 1970. Les personnes qui, tout en ne sachant pas suffisamment lire ou écrire, trouvaient sans problèmes du travail en période de plein emploi, se sont

retrouvées en période de crise parmi les premiers licenciés, puis parmi les chômeurs les plus difficilement reclassables.

Non seulement l'embauche s'est raréfiée, mais en outre, les entreprises, en fonction de la loi de l'offre et de la demande d'emplois, ont relevé leurs exigences en matière de qualification. Par ailleurs, la structure de l'emploi s'est profondément modifiée en 20 ans, avec une hypertrophie du secteur tertiaire et un développement des technologies de pointe dans l'industrie, entraînant la disparition massive des emplois non qualifiés.

Près de 50 p. 100 des chômeurs de longue durée (chômeurs depuis au moins deux années) recensés par le Service subrégional de l'emploi en province de Namur ne possèdent pas le diplôme de l'enseignement primaire. Ces personnes sont automatiquement exclues des filières classiques de formation professionnelle (cours de promotion sociale, formations tertiaires ou secondaires de l'Office de l'emploi, formations des classes moyennes), dont le niveau d'exigences à l'entrée est trop élevé pour un public sous-scolarisé. À la limite, pour bon nombre d'entre elles, l'alphabétisation est vraiment la seule formation accessible, précédant une remise à niveau des connaissances de base.

Après avoir rappelé le contexte économique qui a fait émerger ce fléau social qu'est l'analphabétisme dans nos pays, il reste à expliquer ce cuisant paradoxe: des gens ont, pour la plupart, fréquenté l'école plusieurs années, parfois plus de huit ans, et se retrouvent à l'âge adulte dans l'incapacité de lire. Car être analphabète dans nos pays où la scolarité est obligatoire suppose que l'on supporte des handicaps et une gêne autrement plus lourds que dans une population où l'analphabétisme demeure largement majoritaire.

Une enquête de Lire et écrire, datant de 1985 et commanditée par la CEE, révèle que les personnes analphabètes accusent ouvertement l'école, ses méthodes et ses maîtres, d'être à l'origine de leur non-acquisition de l'écrit, voire de leur exclusion[2].

Les coupes sombres dans les budgets de l'éducation par des gouvernements préoccupés de la dette publique ont entraîné les classes trop peuplées, la vétusté des matériels éducatifs, la démotivation des acteurs du système, élèves et enseignants, et, en clair, le dysfonctionnement global de l'école par rapport à son objectif de démocratisation des études.

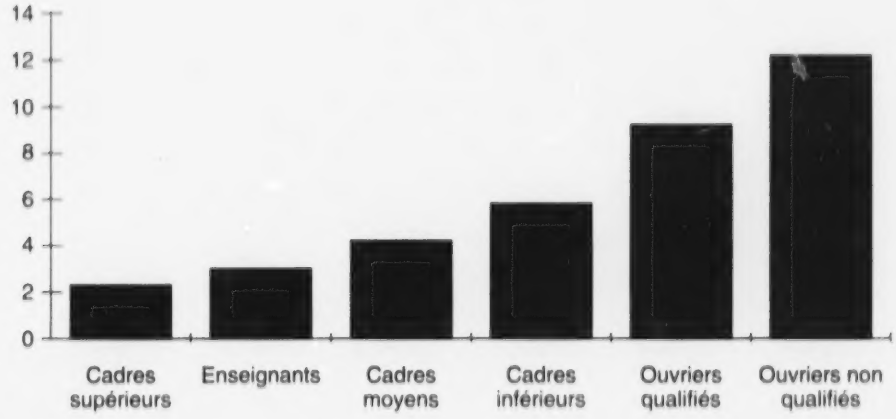
Non seulement l'école n'a pas trouvé ou ne s'est pas donné les moyens de prendre en considération et de valoriser dans l'apprentissage les formes d'expression des enfants, différentes selon les milieux, mais, en imposant un modèle culturel unique dans son action de compensation des carences du milieu familial, elle a eu et continue d'avoir une attitude de type colonisateur qui entraîne chez beaucoup d'enfants un rejet inconscient de l'apprentissage, et en définitive l'échec.

Outre que l'école ne peut compenser efficacement, dans l'état actuel des choses, les carences du milieu familial, sa précarisation progressive — c'est le cas du moins en Belgique francophone — entraîne comme conséquence que c'est à présent le milieu familial — certains milieux familiaux — qui, le plus souvent, suppléent aux carences du milieu scolaire.

Il ressort de cette évolution une double discrimination pour les enfants qui sont étrangers par leur origine familiale à ce modèle culturel dominant. Ni l'école ni les parents ne compensent des carences qui s'accumulent par rapport aux autres élèves. Il s'ensuit inévitablement un accroissement du retard, voire du fossé entre les uns et les autres.

En Belgique, 25 p. 100 des élèves de l'enseignement professionnel — celui-ci représentant un quart de la population du secondaire — quittent l'école sans le moindre bout de diplôme, avec des compétences précaires en écriture, calcul, lecture. N'ayant en général pas acquis une maîtrise durable de ces connaissances, ils iront grossir les rangs des analphabètes fonctionnels.

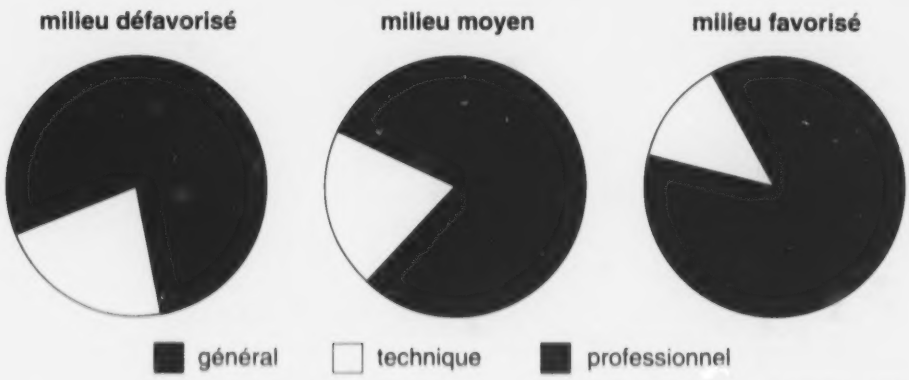
Le fossé entre le modèle culturel véhiculé par l'école et les modèles réels du vécu des enfants issus des milieux les plus démunis entraîne donc une reproduction des inégalités et conduit finalement à l'amertume, au dégoût pour la connaissance et à l'exclusion de ces enfants de toute filière de formation. À cet égard, les chiffres de l'échec scolaire lié au milieu socio-culturel sont éloquents:



Source: Le Ligueur*, 1990

TABLEAU VII: Pourcentage d'enfants en retard en fin de 6e primaire, 1984 (selon la profession de leur père)

* *Le Ligueur*: périodique de la Ligue des familles de Belgique.



Source : Le Ligueur, 1990

TABLEAU VIII : Orientation dans les divers types d'enseignement suivant la hiérarchie sociale (en 1984)

L'exclusion du cadre scolaire, qui prive les personnes de la formation nécessaire pour trouver un emploi et les condamne à toutes les formes d'assistance, va se répercuter sur les conditions de vie. La plupart des analphabètes, exclus du circuit du travail, sont en situation de précarité, disposant à peine du minimum sociovital accordé par le Centre public d'aide sociale ou l'Office national de l'emploi. Au moindre accident ou faux pas, ils sont prêts à tomber dans la spirale de la grande pauvreté qui, selon une enquête du Centrum voor Sociaal Beleid de l'Université d'Anvers, touche 7,3 p. 100 des ménages belges.

Cette grande pauvreté, définie comme un état permanent de manque et de privation, se conjugue avec l'insalubrité du logement et la dégradation de l'état de santé. En Wallonie, 107 000 ménages vivent dans des bâtiments insalubres. La province de Namur est l'une des plus mal loties, avec 45 p. 100 des logements qui sont insalubres. Ce sont les communes rurales qui sont les plus touchées, avec un taux d'insalubrité de 56 p. 100, étant donné la hausse des loyers à Namur, les démolitions, les expropriations et la surenchère immobilière pour un commerce et un habitat de luxe au centre-ville. Certaines personnes ne trouvent même plus à se loger. Sans domicile connu, elles squattent des immeubles abandonnés ou dorment à la gare...

Enfin, l'aspect santé, vu les conditions effarantes de vie de beaucoup d'analphabètes (manque de chauffage, malnutrition, insalubrité du logement, soucis matériels constants, etc.), revêt un caractère particulièrement dramatique. Toutes les conditions sont réunies pour altérer gravement l'organisme. Outre que la maladie entraîne de nouveaux frais pour ces personnes qui vivent déjà dans la précarité, elle leur impose de se

débrouiller avec les documents de la mutuelle et les prescriptions médicales (ce à quoi un analphabète peut difficilement faire face) et des situations entraînant de toute façon la gêne et la dépendance.

L'analphabétisme et l'exclusion sociale qui en découle apparaissent donc comme le résultat d'une accumulation d'événements qui s'articulent et se renforcent. La conjonction et l'accumulation successives de facteurs (école/chômage/revenus/logement) enclenchent un processus de marginalisation globale. C'est pourquoi il est si important, quand on s'adresse à ce public, de conjuguer les efforts de tous, en particulier ceux des travailleurs sociaux et des personnes chargées des formations de base (tels les enseignants et les animateurs en alphabétisation).

À long terme, alphabétiser suppose aussi lutter pour le droit à un logement décent, former les jeunes sous-scolarisés à un métier, ce qui passe aussi par le changement à l'intérieur même de l'école. Il importe de concourir ensemble à une formation sociale au sens le plus large, assurant ainsi aux analphabètes une possibilité réelle de formation et de réinsertion dans un rôle actif au sein de la société.

L'ALPHABÉTISATION: SON CADRE ASSOCIATIF DANS LA COMMUNAUTÉ FRANÇAISE ET DANS LA PROVINCE DE NAMUR

Depuis une vingtaine d'années, existent en Belgique des lieux et associations d'alphabétisation. Jusqu'au début des années 1980, il s'agissait dans l'objectif de ces associations d'alphabétiser les étrangers : travailleurs immigrés et leur famille, réfugiés politiques. C'est seulement en 1982, dans le contexte de crise et de chômage décrit précédemment, que deux associations bruxelloises prennent conscience de l'analphabétisme au sein de la population belge. Ce sont l'ATD Quart-Monde (Aide à toute détresse) et le Collectif d'alphabétisation.

Dans leur sillage, aux quatre coins de la Communauté française, plusieurs groupes d'éducation permanente issus du mouvement ouvrier dans ses tendances chrétiennes et socialistes et assurant habituellement des formations aux travailleurs, aux publics peu scolarisés et aux jeunes exclus de l'école, commencent à se préoccuper de l'analphabétisme et décident de collaborer dans la mise en place d'une structure d'alphabétisation. Ces groupes s'assemblent donc régionalement en fédérations pluralistes. Citons Canal-Emploi à Liège, Défis à Bruxelles, Radio-télévision-animation à Namur et la FUNOC (Formation pour l'université ouverte à Charleroi). Ensemble, elles vont constituer une coordination dans la Communauté française de Belgique, qui organisera une première opération de sensibilisation à l'occasion de la Journée internationale de l'alphabétisation, le 8 septembre 1983.

Cette coordination prit alors le nom de « Lire et écrire ». Lire et écrire se fixe pour objectif central de permettre à tous ceux qui le souhaitent, dans la Communauté française de Belgique, d'apprendre à lire et à écrire[1].

À la suite de cette première campagne, des groupes d'alphabétisation issus de différents mouvements d'éducation permanente, en relation avec les fédérations régionales, se créent, principalement dans le sillon industriel Sambre et Meuse. Pour la province de Namur, citons les groupes de Namur, de Sambreville et d'Andenne.

Se pose alors la nécessité des premières formations d'animateurs en alphabétisation. Ces formations seront au départ assurées par les groupes précurseurs (Collectif d'alphabétisation de Bruxelles), relayés ensuite régionalement par des animateurs qui, au sein de leur groupe, ont pu acquérir rapidement un maximum d'expérience.

Dans la province de Namur, des groupes d'alphabétisation de divers horizons s'associent et créent une coordination namuroise. Cette coordination régionale Lire et écrire, née en 1984, assurera les liens entre les groupes de base, les associations partenaires et Lire et écrire communautaire; elle jouera un rôle de représentation auprès des pouvoirs publics; sur le terrain, elle orchestrera les formations de formateurs, orientera les nouveaux apprenants vers les centres, encouragera les initiatives méthodologiques des groupes et jouera enfin un rôle de secrétariat.

Très vite, la coordination namuroise deviendra partenaire des autres organismes de formation pour adultes, tels les écoles de Promotion sociale, les centres de formation professionnelle de l'Office national de l'emploi, le Centre d'enseignement namurois des arts et métiers, la Radio-télévision-animation et les différents mouvements d'éducation permanente, au sein d'une structure officielle, le Comité subrégional de l'emploi, où se côtoient, outre ces organismes de formation, des représentants des chefs d'entreprises, des organisations de travailleurs et des pouvoirs publics provinciaux.

Entre-temps, à la suite des campagnes annuelles et selon les besoins ressentis, de nouveaux groupes d'alphabétisation voient le jour un peu partout dans la province, à Gembloux, Ciney, Dinant, Rochefort, Marche.

COMMENT DES SYNERGIES SONT NÉES ENTRE LE SECTEUR ASSOCIATIF ET LES POUVOIRS PUBLICS DANS LA PROVINCE DE NAMUR

Devant faire face à une demande accrue de formation sur un territoire plus vaste et ayant besoin de moyens dépassant son budget, la coordination namuroise Lire et écrire invite la province, par l'intermédiaire

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de la Députation permanente, qui est son organe de gestion politique, à prendre en charge la formation des animateurs en alphabétisation.

Précisons ici que chaque province belge dispose de son propre réseau d'enseignement et compte différentes écoles provinciales sur son territoire*. À Namur, les «Cours pour éducateurs en fonction», une école provinciale de Promotion sociale formant des éducateurs et des animateurs pour le secteur associatif, entretenaient déjà des contacts et des collaborations avec les mouvements d'éducation permanente du secteur associatif, auxquels la coordination namuroise, par l'intermédiaire des groupes d'alphabétisation, était indirectement liée.

Un programme de formation est donc proposé par la coordination namuroise, et la Députation permanente provinciale consent, pour l'année 1987, à titre expérimental, à lancer un module de formation de 150 heures. Une dizaine d'animateurs en alphabétisation des différents coins de la province vont ainsi être formés. Ce sont des responsables de mouvements d'éducation permanente et des animateurs en alphabétisation issus de groupes comptant déjà quatre ans d'expérience qui assureront cette formation, financée par le pouvoir public provincial.

L'année suivante, les «Cours pour éducateurs en fonction» de la province de Namur, avec le concours de la coordination namuroise, créeront un nouveau module de formation de type cycle court agréé par le ministère de l'Éducation nationale. Cette fois, ceux qui dispensent la formation doivent obligatoirement être détenteurs des titres pédagogiques requis par l'Éducation nationale et, au terme de la formation, un certificat est délivré aux personnes ayant suivi les cours. Ces deux conditions marquent la reconnaissance officielle de la formation dans le circuit de l'enseignement de Promotion sociale.

L'équipe de chargés de cours assurant la formation restera constituée, comme l'année précédente, de praticiens des groupes d'alphabétisation travaillant déjà depuis quelques années dans le secteur, mais possédant les titres requis (agrégés de l'enseignement secondaire, assistants sociaux). La mise sur pied de cette formation témoigne des premières collaborations entre la coordination et les groupes d'alphabétisation issus du secteur associatif, d'une part, et, d'autre part, un pouvoir public, la province, et une école provinciale de Promotion sociale. Ces synergies entre les associations et l'enseignement public pour la formation d'animateurs en alphabétisation ont depuis continué à se réaliser chaque année. La formation actuelle compte 18 personnes.

* Il existe quatre réseaux d'enseignement en zone francophone : l'enseignement de la Communauté française, l'enseignement communal, l'enseignement provincial et l'enseignement confessionnel.

En 1989, la coordination namuroise est devenue l'ASBL «Lire et écrire Namur». À part ce changement de statut juridique, ses attributions sont restées les mêmes.

L'ANNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE L'ALPHABÉTISATION DANS LA PROVINCE DE NAMUR OU COMMENT POSER LES JALONS D'UN PARTENARIAT CONCERTÉ ENTRE POUVOIRS PUBLICS ET ASSOCIATIONS

Lire et écrire Namur a voulu saisir toutes les occasions offertes par la célébration d'une année internationale pour répandre les activités d'alphabétisation sur tout le territoire de la province de Namur. En effet, jusqu'en 1989, l'alphabétisation s'était développée dans les centres de plus de 15 000 habitants, laissant à la traîne la majorité des petites communes de la province.

Durant cette année où les médias et les pouvoirs publics ont montré un intérêt croissant pour les actions d'alphabétisation, Lire et écrire Namur a élaboré un programme de sensibilisation à l'intention de trois publics bien précis:

1. Les mandataires politiques provinciaux et communaux, qui ont le pouvoir de décider, d'octroyer ou de revendiquer auprès des autorités intéressées les moyens d'action nécessaires à la campagne et aux divers besoins en matière d'alphabétisation;
2. Les responsables et les travailleurs des mouvements d'éducation permanente (secteur associatif) et des CPAS* (secteur public communal) sur tout le territoire de la province, en tant que relais privilégiés dans la lutte contre l'illettrisme;
3. La population, pour la rendre plus consciente du problème et pour s'assurer sa collaboration dans l'accompagnement, le soutien aux personnes analphabètes ainsi que dans la déculpabilisation de ces personnes.

Notre propos sera de décrire ici l'approche des pouvoirs publics par Lire et écrire Namur, la démarche de sensibilisation et les résultats de ce type de démarche.

Nous avons vu précédemment que des collaborations étroites s'étaient établies depuis 1987 en ce qui concerne la formation des animateurs en alphabétisation entre la province, par l'intermédiaire de son enseignement de Promotion sociale (Cours pour éducateurs en fonction), et la

* CPAS: Centre public d'aide sociale, organisme chargé d'élaborer les dossiers des personnes nécessiteuses et d'octroyer une aide.

coordination namuroise. Dans le cadre, cette fois, de l'Année internationale de l'alphabétisation, c'est de nouveau la Députation permanente provinciale qui est contactée la première.

Dans le but d'élargir le mouvement de sensibilisation à l'ensemble de la province, le député permanent chargé de l'Enseignement et l'Éducation convie les représentants des communes sous tutelle de la province à une première séance d'information et de contacts avec Lire et écrire Namur. La moitié d'entre eux, essentiellement des échevins communaux des Affaires sociales et de l'Enseignement, mais aussi quelques bourgmestres, répondent à cette invitation en mars 1990.

La sensibilisation des mandataires communaux est axée sur l'ampleur de l'analphabétisme dans la province, chiffres et estimations à l'appui, ainsi que sur les principaux types d'analphabétisme et sur le vécu des personnes analphabètes. La notion de citoyenneté est mise en avant. Comment, en effet, être citoyen à part entière quant on n'a pas les moyens de s'exprimer, quand on se trouve dans l'impossibilité d'exercer ses droits économiques, sociaux et culturels? Car priver un individu ou un groupe social de l'accès à la lecture et à l'écriture, c'est le priver des moyens d'expression politique et des instruments de base nécessaires à sa participation aux décisions concernant son existence et son devenir.

Ainsi, la condition essentielle pour l'exercice efficace de la plupart des droits proclamés par la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme se révèle être l'alphabétisation.

Lire et écrire propose alors aux mandataires le texte d'une Charte provinciale ou d'un manifeste namurois pour une campagne d'alphabétisation (texte cité au début du chapitre). Rappelons brièvement qu'au travers de cette Charte, les communes s'engagent à soutenir matériellement les initiatives d'alphabétisation sur leur territoire et à instaurer un maximum de collaboration avec les différents acteurs sociaux (assistants sociaux des CPAS, associations, groupes d'alphabétisation).

Il est décidé d'emporter la Charte dans sa commune, d'en présenter le contenu et d'en délibérer au conseil communal. Au terme des délibérations, un passage au vote dans chaque commune déterminera l'acceptation ou le rejet de cette Charte.

Deux mois plus tard, 22 communes sur les 38 que compte l'entité provinciale avaient leur Charte signée. Il restait alors à confronter les actions entreprises dans les différentes communes pour dynamiser le processus, encourager les moins motivées, tirer les premières conclusions de l'expérience.

Ce fut l'objet d'une deuxième assemblée des mandataires communaux, convoquée par la Députation permanente en collaboration avec Lire et écrire Namur. Les communes qui avaient pris des initiatives dans le sens de la Charte présentèrent leurs actions. Certaines avaient organisé des séances d'information avec Lire et écrire pour des publics ciblés susceptibles de faire face à l'analphabétisme.

Ainsi, des réunions s'étaient tenues, tantôt avec les enseignants et directeurs d'écoles communales, tantôt avec les médecins, tantôt avec les responsables des associations, tantôt avec les conseillers, les assistants sociaux du CPAS, pour une collaboration concertée au même objectif communautaire. D'autres communes avaient sensibilisé leur population grâce à la feuille communale.

Cependant, un besoin urgent de formation sur les mécanismes entraînant l'illettrisme et sur les possibilités concrètes de réinsertion se faisait sentir dans de nombreuses communes. Ainsi, Lire et écrire Namur et la Députation permanente s'engagèrent-elles à répondre à cette demande.

En octobre 1990, deux journées d'études consacrées à l'insertion sociale, à la formation professionnelle et à l'illettrisme furent organisées pour les communes signataires de la Charte, à l'intention des travailleurs sociaux, psychologues, enseignants, éducateurs, formateurs et employés communaux. Des experts belges et étrangers collaborèrent à ces journées de réflexion. On retrouve dans l'orchestration de cette formation la même volonté de synergie entre le secteur associatif et le secteur public, puisque le Service d'études et de documentation sociale de la province de Namur, Lire et écrire Namur et les Cours pour éducateurs de la province de Namur sont tous trois partie prenante. Au terme de cette journée, le Gouverneur de la province et tous les responsables politiques des communes ayant marqué leur adhésion vinrent signer à titre symbolique une charte monumentale.

Par ailleurs, dès septembre 1990, à l'occasion de la Journée mondiale de l'alphabétisation, Lire et écrire Namur avait lancé un appel à tous les acteurs du monde associatif de la province de Namur pour réfléchir à la lutte contre l'illettrisme de façon globale, en essayant de ne pas se faire mutuellement concurrence et de bien prendre en considération les facteurs multiples de l'exclusion sociale.

Soixante-six associations répondirent à l'appel et rédigèrent ensemble, de réunion en réunion, le livre blanc sur l'exclusion sociale. Ce livre blanc et les propositions qui le concluent ont été présentés à la Députation permanente. À l'issue de cette réunion, il fut décidé que ce livre blanc serait examiné dans une séance officielle de la Députation et proposé ensuite aux communes.

Parallèlement à cette volonté de sensibilisation, et sans doute grâce à elle, le nombre d'apprenants est passé de 127 à 185 de janvier 1990 à janvier 1991, c'est-à-dire qu'il enregistre une hausse de plus de 45 p. 100. Lire et écrire Namur coordonne aujourd'hui l'action de 24 groupes d'alphabétisation répartis dans toute la province.

Pour parvenir à financer ce processus d'alphabétisation à travers toute la province, stabiliser un tant soit peu l'emploi — quand on sait que toute la somme de travail repose sur quatre travailleurs ACS* et sur une vingtaine de bénévoles —, il fallait enfin réunir toutes les énergies disponibles, toutes les forces vives d'une région dans un même objectif communautaire: la lutte contre l'illettrisme. Nous avons déjà décrit comment le

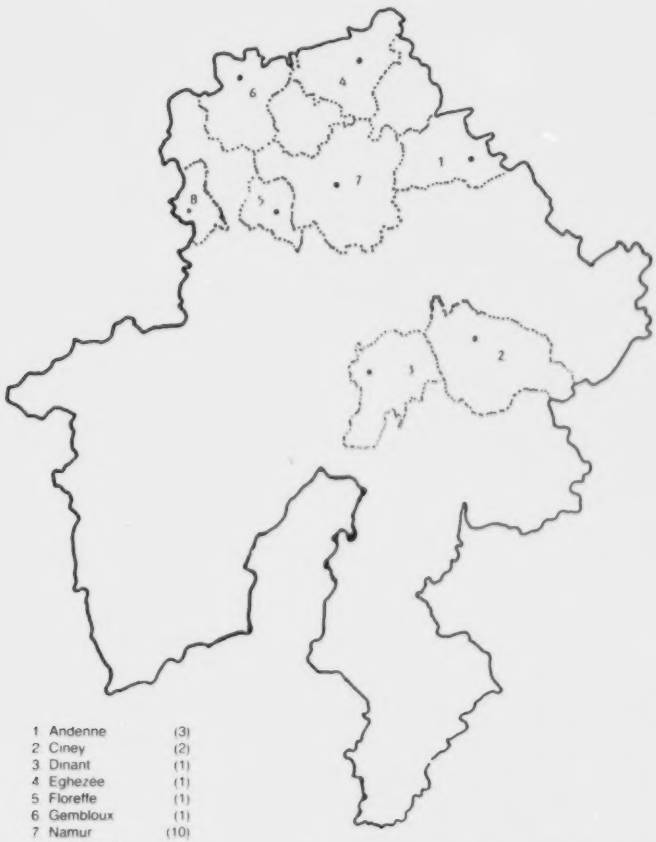

TABLEAU IX: Répartition des groupes d'alphabétisation à travers la province de Namur

* Agent contractuel subventionné: statut de travailleur conçu par la législation belge de résorption du chômage.

secteur associatif, les pouvoirs politiques provinciaux et communaux et leurs services ont combiné leurs efforts dans l'engagement à l'égard de la Charte. Il restait alors à motiver d'autres partenaires, les entreprises, les banques et les universités et à les associer à la démarche.

La fondation Émile-Lacroix, du nom du Gouverneur émérite, répond à cette fin. Ses objectifs sont les suivants:

— Développer la lutte contre l'illettrisme dans le cadre d'une action globale de lutte contre l'exclusion sociale;

— Soutenir les initiatives d'alphabétisation de Lire et écrire par l'intermédiaire de moyens humains et financiers;

— Coordonner avec Lire et écrire l'action au sein des communes pour la réalisation du contenu de la Charte;

— Favoriser tout projet de coordination orienté vers l'alphabétisation: CPAS, Lire et écrire, mouvements;

— Patronner les campagnes de collecte de fonds en faveur des programmes d'alphabétisation;

— Organiser un mois par année une sensibilisation intensive sur le problème de l'illettrisme;

— Promouvoir et récompenser la production de documents et de livres ou la recherche dans le domaine de l'alphabétisation;

— Organiser des manifestations publiques: concerts, compétitions sportives, galas en faveur de l'alphabétisation.

Plusieurs entreprises renommées de la province de Namur sont disposées à répondre à cet appel. Dans leur sillage, nous espérons la participation des universités et des banques. Car le développement local que représente ici l'extension du processus d'alphabétisation n'est pas la somme des dimensions sociales, éducatives, culturelles, politiques et économiques, mais le tissu de liens, d'interactions, de complémentarité entre partenaires dans leur totalité qui joue un effet multiplicateur dans l'effort commun de réinsertion sociale et le bien-être d'une communauté d'êtres humains.

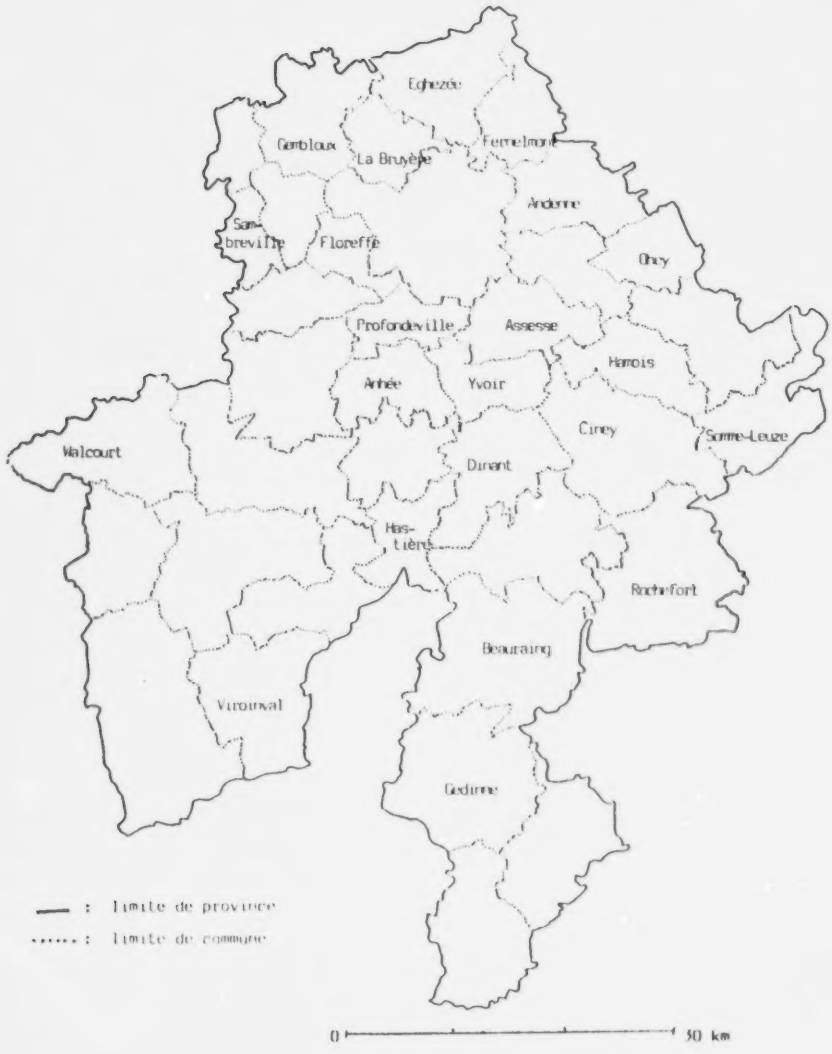

TABLEAU X: Liste des communes signataires de la Charte

CONCLUSION

La construction d'un partenariat entre Lire et écrire Namur, les différents mouvements d'éducation permanente, les pouvoirs publics provinciaux et communaux, leurs administrations et les acteurs de terrain (animateurs, éducateurs, assistants sociaux, enseignants, médecins, aides familiales) apparaît comme un processus de longue haleine.

Rappelons qu'en 1985, il existait déjà à Namur une structure officielle, le Comité subrégional de l'emploi, rassemblant les responsables des organismes de formation pour adultes (mouvements d'éducation permanente, Office national de l'emploi, écoles de Promotion sociale, etc.), les représentants des entreprises, ceux des travailleurs et ceux des pouvoirs publics régionaux dans un même objectif de développement local de l'emploi.

Lire et écrire Namur — à l'époque, la coordination namuroise —, en marquant d'emblée son entrée dans cette structure, a pu mettre au point dès 1986 une stratégie en plusieurs points vis-à-vis des partenaires locaux:

1) Officialiser son action et celle des différents groupes d'alphabétisation;

2) Inscrire cette action dans le champ régional de l'emploi et de la formation;

3) Combler les lacunes existant dans ce champ à l'égard du public sous-scolarisé;

4) Fréquenter les acteurs du champ, participer à leurs échanges, mieux les connaître, et de ce fait percevoir globalement les ressources et possibilités de ce champ;

5) Établir des collaborations, mettre sur pied des actions concertées avec certains partenaires (école de Promotion sociale provinciale — administration provinciale).

Par ailleurs, si la coordination namuroise Lire et écrire a pu pénétrer sans difficulté cette structure trop officielle que représente le Comité subrégional de l'emploi, c'est sans doute parce qu'elle y a été introduite par l'ensemble des mouvements d'éducation permanente de la région qui soutenaient les groupes d'alphabétisation, ou pratiquaient l'alphabétisation, et étaient déjà bien insérés dans la structure.

Les contacts privilégiés avec l'école de Promotion sociale provinciale, et par ce moyen avec la province, reposent également sur toute une collaboration préexistant à Lire et écrire entre cette école formant des

éducateurs sociaux et des animateurs socioculturels et tout le tissu associatif régional.

Lire et écrire Namur a donc fondé son action sur une assise déjà solide de collaborateurs et mis à profit la connaissance du terrain, l'expérience et l'intégration locale de ses responsables, parmi lesquels certains animateurs de mouvements d'éducation permanente bien implantés dans la région namuroise. À travers les groupes d'alphabétisation et les associations qui le constituent, Lire et écrire portait déjà en lui cette exigence fondamentale de pluralisme et de complémentarité, par-delà les concurrences et divergences idéologiques.

La stratégie depuis 1985 a toujours consisté en une succession de contacts et de collaborations avec divers partenaires matérialisées autour d'un objectif d'action. Il en fut ainsi pour les formations d'animateurs en alphabétisation, puis, au cours de l'Année internationale de l'alphabétisation, pour l'adhésion à la Charte, la rédaction du livre blanc sur l'exclusion sociale, les journées d'études sur l'insertion sociale et, enfin, la mise sur pied de la fondation Émile-Lacroix.

Chaque acteur, au-delà de l'association, de l'administration ou du pouvoir qu'il représentait, a été amené à s'engager personnellement. Dans ce processus communautaire, chacun a apporté sa pierre à l'édifice, depuis l'animateur bénévole en alphabétisation ou le représentant de mouvement d'éducation permanente prenant conscience, à travers la rédaction du livre blanc sur l'exclusion sociale, de l'impératif que représente l'action concertée à ce niveau et faisant fi des anciennes querelles de clocher qui divisent parfois encore les associations, jusqu'à l'échevin des Affaires sociales ou de l'Enseignement retournant dans sa commune pénétré de l'enjeu de la Charte et mobilisant par des contacts personnalisés tout un réseau local de professions et d'acteurs sociaux engagés dans la résolution du problème (conseillers du Centre public d'aide sociale, employés communaux, enseignants, médecins, travailleurs sociaux, etc.).

Ce bilan des étapes parcourues jusqu'à ce jour ne marque pas un temps d'arrêt. Bien au contraire, il invite à poursuivre la campagne d'alphabétisation jusqu'aux lieux les plus éloignés des centres urbains. Extension géographique, mais aussi travail approfondi auprès des responsables de l'enseignement, de la culture, du social pour la mise en place de programmes de prévention de l'illettrisme et d'alphabétisation.

Cet effort ne sera complet que si le secteur économique joue un rôle dans ce vaste plan d'action pour le droit à la formation. Les entreprises sont invitées à apporter une contribution à cet effort collectif pour la réalisation de la déclaration «Le droit d'apprendre», adoptée à l'occasion de la quatrième Conférence internationale de l'Unesco sur l'éducation des adultes (1985):

« Plus que jamais, la reconnaissance du droit d'apprendre
constitue un enjeu majeur de l'humanité. »
« Le droit d'apprendre, c'est le droit de lire et d'écrire
le droit de questionner et de réfléchir
le droit à l'imagination et à la création
le droit de lire son milieu et d'écrire son histoire
le droit d'accéder aux ressources éducatives
le droit de développer ses compétences individuelles
et collectives, de lire la réalité et de maîtriser
son environnement. »

La formation est indispensable à la bonne marche des entreprises publiques et privées, lesquelles investissent de plus en plus de temps et d'argent dans des formations extrêmement diverses. Celles-ci ne sont efficaces que si les connaissances de base des salariés sont suffisantes. La sensibilisation des entreprises au problème de l'analphabétisme et à la nécessité d'investir en ce domaine sera une tâche importante à poursuivre durant la décennie. Cela suppose que l'alphabétisation s'impose comme première étape d'un long processus de formation qui resocialise l'individu, le qualifie pour une activité professionnelle, le rende plus apte à exercer sa citoyenneté.

Les pistes d'action pour l'avenir ne font pas défaut ; à titre d'exemple, en voici quelques-unes extraites du livre blanc *L'exclusion sociale*[4] :

— Commanditer un « outil statistique permanent » sur les facteurs et les chiffres de l'exclusion sociale dans la province. Cet outil permettrait alors d'adapter, de manière permanente, les politiques de lutte contre l'exclusion sociale en fonction des besoins sur le plan local ;

— Relayer auprès des pouvoirs publics appropriés la demande pressante de moyens accrus pour l'alphabétisation en matière d'emplois et de finances, pour toute la province de Namur ;

— Dans le programme d'études des futurs enseignants (écoles normales), inclure des modules de sensibilisation et d'information sur le problème de l'exclusion dès l'école, corollaire du décrochage scolaire, et sur le phénomène de l'illettrisme en général ;

— Soutenir les écoles rurales et les écoles intégrées dans la vie du quartier ;

— Intégrer les parents dans la démarche éducative scolaire, en particulier en milieu immigré et défavorisé, et aussi tenter des expériences d'écoles bien intégrées dans la vie du quartier ou du village ;

— Organiser les cours d'alphabétisation et de remise à niveau des connaissances sur les lieux mêmes où se trouve le public marginalisé: CPAS, maisons d'accueil, hôtels maternels, restos du cœur, etc.;

— En matière d'insertion professionnelle, renforcer la participation des organisations de travailleurs dans la formation du public le plus défavorisé parmi les demandeurs d'emploi;

— Créer un plus vaste réseau de lieux d'accueil et d'orientation vers les formations existantes, sur le modèle du COISP (Centre d'orientation et d'insertion socioprofessionnelle).

En fait, il s'agit d'un échantillon restreint de propositions de travail à mettre en œuvre dans les années à venir, dont l'application va nécessiter d'intenses efforts de concertation, de coordination, de la part des pouvoirs publics et associations.

La responsabilité de l'éducation et de l'alphabétisation incombe en dernière analyse aux pouvoirs publics. La réponse aux besoins collectifs et aux divers problèmes de l'exclusion sociale dépend de leur décision politique. Ils ont le devoir de s'assurer que l'éducation soit propre à répondre aux besoins d'aujourd'hui et de demain, par la recherche de solutions appropriées.

C'est chaque citoyen qui est convié à s'intéresser à l'alphabétisation, tant à la prévention de l'illettrisme qu'à la mise en place de programmes extra-scolaires pour remédier aux effets néfastes de ce fléau social. Les pouvoirs publics doivent se sentir interpellés, l'avenir de la société en dépend. C'est donc un enjeu démocratique. La tâche est énorme, cependant les perspectives sont prometteuses, l'expérience exposée en ces quelques lignes en est un des signes.

«*Chaque nouvel alphabétisé est un esprit mobilisable pour combattre le syndrome du dénuement, de l'inégalité, de la maladie et d'autres maux dont l'analphabétisme participe*», comme le soulignait le directeur général de l'Unesco. Créer un monde, une région, une province sans analphabètes représente une fantastique gageure, mais ce n'est pas un rêve irréalisable. Nous savons ce qu'il faut faire. Nous devons accélérer le rythme et amplifier les efforts communs.

NOTES

1. Sylvie-Anne Goffinet et Dirk van Damme, *Analphabétisme fonctionnel en Belgique*, Bruxelles et Hambourg, Fondation Roi Baudouin et Institut de l'Unesco pour l'Éducation, 1990.

2. S.-A. Goffinet, A. Loontjens, A. Loebenstein et C. Kestelyn, *Les itinéraires d'analphabétisme*, Luxembourg, Office des publications officielles des communautés européennes, 1986.

3. Catherine Kestelyn, « La campagne d'alphabétisation dans la communauté française de Belgique », *Alpha 88 — Recherches en alphabétisation*, sous la direction de Jean-Paul Hautecœur, Québec, ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1988.

4. Livre blanc *L'exclusion sociale*, document réalisé par un groupe de personnes membres des organisations de la vie associative de la province de Namur (rédaction : Anne Verbeek).

L'EXPÉRIENCE DE L'ALPHA MONS-BORINAGE

Omer Arrijs
Alpha Mons-Borinage
Belgique

QUEL BILAN?

Après 15 ans d'expérience, nous en sommes encore et toujours à nous poser des questions aussi simples, mais aussi denses à la fois, que: «Que faire? Pourquoi? Comment?» Interrogations très concrètes. En effet, nous avons expérimenté jour après jour et dans les faits combien l'intérêt des communautés, des groupes et des personnes qualifiés d'«analphabètes» est d'une nature bien différente de celui des autorités qui les désignent ainsi, les classant d'emblée dans la marge, qui conçoivent des stratégies d'alphabétisation, au nom du droit de tous à l'éducation et au savoir. La communication se situe au cœur de notre action. Pourtant, nous n'avons pas pu établir, dans les faits, de véritable communication entre la société et ceux qu'elle institue «analphabètes» ou «illettrés» par l'acte même où elle les nomme ainsi. Contrairement à ce que dit le discours officiel, la société ne se nourrit-elle pas de l'analphabétisme qu'elle produit pour garantir la reproduction de ses structures inégales? L'analphabétisme lui est nécessaire, ainsi que l'alphabétisation dans ses formes actuelles, qui est inefficace.

Voici ce qu'écrit un groupe de participants pauvres et illettrés du Bengale occidental qui participent à un programme d'éducation des adultes, dans un poème intitulé «Pourquoi devrions-nous être alphabétisés?»:

> «Mais il nous faut savoir pourquoi nous devrions être alphabétisés.
>
> «Nous avons déjà participé à des cours d'alphabétisation. Mais après quelque temps, nous sommes devenus sages.
>
> «Nous nous sommes sentis trompés — alors nous avons cessé le cours.
>
> «Savez-vous ce que nous avons trouvé?
>
> «Les Babus Bureaucrates ont pris ce travail dans leur propre intérêt.
>
> «Il y avait peut-être des élections prochaines ou peut-être une subvention gouvernementale ou quelque chose qui devait être utilisé. Ce qu'ils nous ont appris a été inutile.

> «Savoir signer son nom ne veut rien dire.
>
> «Savoir lire quelques mots ne veut rien dire.
>
> «Nous étions d'accord pour venir aux cours.
>
> «Si vous nous appreniez comment ne plus dépendre des autres.
>
> «[...] L'alphabétisation peut-elle nous aider à vivre un peu mieux? À moins mourir de faim?
>
> «[...] Ce programme nous apprendra-t-il à penser et à travailler ensemble? L'apprentissage comportera-t-il la pratique? S'il fait tout cela, alors nous irons tous aux cours d'alphabétisation, et ce sera apprendre à vivre une vie meilleure [...][1].»

Sans doute, il ne faut pas simplifier. Sans doute, il faut reconnaître que les actions d'alphabétisation, dans les sociétés industrialisées comme dans le Sud, ont eu certains résultats. Mais il faut dire qu'ils sont minces et qu'ils ne portent pas sur le fond du problème.

L'interpellation des paysans du Bengale à leurs formateurs, à quelques points près, est valable chez nous. La majorité des «analphabètes» ne font pas grand cas de nos dispositifs de formation[2]. Nous n'avons pas communiqué avec eux. Nous sommes restés à la surface des questions. Nous n'avons pas vraiment analysé les enjeux, faute notamment d'avoir placé les «analphabètes» eux-mêmes au centre de la démarche, faute aussi d'avoir suffisamment analysé les liens entre l'alphabétisation et une démarche de libération plus large touchant au fonctionnement même de la démocratie et au type de développement de nos sociétés. L'alphabétisation est assez largement restée un alibi pour continuer à faire globalement les mêmes choses. L'alphabétisation reste un élément de la gestion marginale de la marginalité.

C'est bien le bilan de notre action qui nous conduit à ces critiques. Trouverons-nous des issues?

LA PREMIÈRE ÉPOQUE DE L'ALPHA MONS-BORINAGE

En Belgique, dans la région de Mons-Borinage, ancienne région charbonnière, avec un taux de chômage officiel de 26 p. 100 (36 p. 100 pour les femmes et 18 p. 100 pour les hommes en juin 1990), le taux le plus élevé au pays, l'exclusion sociale est une question brûlante.

L'association Alpha y naît en septembre 1976. Au départ, elle organise des cours de français, oral et écrit, pour les travailleurs immigrés (marocains, algériens, turcs, italiens, espagnols, etc.) dans plusieurs localités du Borinage. Nous touchons quelque 80 personnes par an. Mais le Borinage

compte environ 47 000 immigrés. De plus, la plupart d'entre eux sont au pays depuis 10, 20, 30 ans, pourtant aucune véritable action de formation linguistique n'avait été organisée auparavant. Pour rappel, l'immigration a été stoppée par les autorités belges en 1974. Pas étonnant dès lors que les cours n'aient pas un succès fou. La plupart des immigrés se sont fabriqué un français d'usage courant dont ils se satisfont.

Le recrutement des participants demande un important travail de contact dans les associations, les quartiers, au domicile des éventuels candidats.

Les objectifs déclarés sont de trois types:

— Utilitaire: acquisition d'outils pour la «survie» en Belgique, c'est-à-dire pour effectuer les démarches nécessaires pour le travail, le logement, la santé, l'éducation, etc.;

— Culturel: expression des identités immigrées, des histoires propres en confrontation avec la culture dominante chez nous;

— Politique: développement d'une conscience critique et d'une action de changement social, particulièrement en ce qui concerne l'immigration, que nous considérons comme mécanisme d'exploitation renforcée; formulation de projets politiques où les milieux populaires expriment leur vision de la société et créent leur histoire.

La pédagogie de libération

L'alphabétisation se veut outil de libération, elle est un acte politique.

Les groupes d'alphabétisation sont tout à la fois des lieux d'apprentissage linguistique et des lieux de débat, à partir de la vie quotidienne, autour des questions clés concernant les immigrés: survie, identité immigrée, emploi, logement, éducation, droit de vote, syndicalisme. Les questions s'élargissent vers l'analyse de société. Tout part de la parole des immigrés. L'apprentissage linguistique est apprentissage d'une capacité d'expression propre, mise en forme d'une pensée en prise sur les réalités vécues, sur les représentations des rapports sociaux. L'alphabétisation ouvre à des démarches quotidiennes comme à la sociologie, au droit, à l'économie, à l'analyse politique, à la recherche de solutions de rechange. Au-delà des cours, l'alphabétisation met en contact ou prolonge le contact avec d'autres associations, d'autres rassemblements, d'autres luttes. Elle s'articule à un réseau plus large d'actions des immigrés.

Ces options et cette méthodologie se réfèrent à Paulo Freire: «La connaissance ne se transfère pas. Elle se crée dans et par l'action sur la réalité[1].» Nous pensons que les peuples se libèrent par eux-mêmes, que le développement de la parole même des opprimés est le moteur du changement social. Nous pouvons nous appuyer sur l'Unesco qui déclare, à Persépolis, en 1975:

> «L'alphabétisation, tout comme l'éducation en général, est un acte politique. Elle n'est pas neutre, car dévoiler la réalité sociale pour la transformer, ou la dissimuler pour la conserver, sont des actes politiques. Il existe donc des structures économiques, sociales, politiques, administratives qui sont favorables à la réalisation du projet d'alphabétisation, d'autres qui lui font obstacle.»

Pour nous, parler, lire, écrire, communiquer, c'est exprimer sa situation sociale, définie par l'exploitation et l'exclusion. Toute parole est parole d'une classe ou d'un groupe social constitué par des intérêts propres. L'enjeu, pour les milieux populaires, c'est la libération et non pas l'insertion. Cette libération passe par l'affirmation de l'identité, du droit à la spécificité culturelle populaire ou immigrée. Elle refuse l'assimilation aux normes dominantes. Nous ne valorisons pas pour autant la marginalisation, puisque nous parlons d'intégration critique. La langue elle-même n'est pas vue comme un système de signes socialement et politiquement neutres. Les codes populaires sont distincts des codes dominants[4]. La langue ne sert même pas prioritairement à communiquer les messages qu'elle prétend communiquer, elle est d'abord positionnement social[5]. La phonétique, la grammaire, le lexique, le système sémantique sont toujours socialement marqués. Ils disent d'entrée de jeu où l'on se situe dans le champ social, à partir d'où l'on parle.

La langue, concrètement utilisée *hic et nunc*, est comme un vêtement, un signe d'appartenance à partir duquel on peut élaborer des stratégies linguistiques et non linguistiques de mise en relation avec d'autres appartenances. De ce point de vue, il est essentiel de favoriser le développement de langages populaires exprimant les identités populaires, et en même temps de développer des langages permettant de communiquer dans les langues officielles.

Une pédagogie dynamique, libératrice, populaire est nécessairement complexe. Son point de départ, c'est l'expression par les participants de leurs propres points de vue sur la réalité, avec leurs termes (leur oralité, leur écriture, leur relecture d'un texte). Nous refusons toute démarche scolaire, tout manuel, tout exercice, tout formalisme grammatical ou linguistique. Il s'agit de faire exister un système propre de signes, de significations, de relations, de formes. Une parole particulière est dite sur la

réalité concrète: le quartier, l'histoire d'immigré, l'école, le pouvoir côtoyé, le travail, le syndicat.

Sur cette base, un élargissement s'opère: enrichissement des moyens linguistiques utilisés dans l'étape précédente. Par des techniques précises de sériation, on fait fonctionner le système linguistique en rapport avec ce qui a été dit et avec les formes produites (correctes ou erronées). L'enrichissement des formes permet et appelle un nouvel élargissement des contenus et des significations. Une dialectique s'instaure entre le travail sur le fond et le travail sur la forme. Notre projet d'alphabétisation cherche à aller de la superficie aux bases du changement social par l'action dans le langage.

Au départ, nous avons travaillé presque exclusivement avec des animateurs bénévoles, dont beaucoup abandonnaient lorsqu'ils découvraient l'ampleur et la difficulté de la tâche. L'«alpha», c'est plus que quelques heures/semaine offertes à des immigrés qui ne connaissent pas ou pas très bien le français. C'est investir dans un processus pédagogique complexe qui met en cause l'animateur-formateur lui-même. Par la suite, nous avons eu accès aux programmes de remise au travail de chômeurs, appelés Plans de résorption du chômage (PRC). Ces programmes visent à mettre au travail des chômeurs, pour un temps limité, dans des projets d'utilité sociale. Plusieurs formules ont vu le jour: Cadres spéciaux temporaires (CST), Troisième circuit de travail (TCT), Chômeurs mis au travail (CMT), Fonds budgétaire interdépartemental (FBI), Agents contractuels subventionnés (ACS), Programmes régionaux d'insertion dans le marché de l'emploi (PRIME).

Nous avons eu accès d'abord aux CST, puis au TCT et au FBI. Je reviendrai plus loin sur la précarité de ces types d'emplois. Dans un premier temps, ils étaient perçus comme une chance, à la fois pour le projet d'alphabétisation, qui pouvait disposer d'un personnel «plus stable» (certaines personnes sont restées plusieurs années chez nous dans ce type d'emploi) et pour le travailleur, qui pouvait sortir du chômage (même si tous les droits des travailleurs ne sont pas respectés). Ce n'est qu'ensuite que nous analyserons cette situation, plus radicalement, comme un jeu de dupes.

Tant pour les bénévoles que pour les travailleurs du PRC, travailleurs sous-statutaires, nous avons organisé de façon continue une formation de formateurs indispensable à la maîtrise des enjeux, des objectifs et des axes méthodologiques. Cette formation comprend des contenus sociolinguistiques, méthodologiques, politiques. Nous avons également apporté notre concours à des cycles de formation de formateurs pour d'autres associations.

Notre méthodologie a été consignée par écrit dans des outils pédagogiques de référence pour les formateurs: il ne s'agit pas de recettes ni de manuels, mais d'axes méthodologiques[6].

Les écoles de devoirs

Peu après avoir démarré les cours d'alphabétisation pour adultes immigrés, nous créons des «écoles de devoirs» dans diverses localités du Borinage sur la base d'objectifs analogues. De la sorte, nous avons tenté de répondre à des préoccupations de mise en relation entre alphabétisation et écoles de devoirs, telles que les présente Véronique Marissal dans *ALPHA 90:* «Il nous semble que tant par rapport à la prévention que par rapport à l'alphabétisation d'une population peu ou pas scolarisée, écoles de devoirs et centres d'alphabétisation pourraient collaborer[7].»

Six centres sont mis sur pied, qui regroupent environ 100 enfants. Est-ce beaucoup? Est-ce peu? Il nous semble qu'il en faudrait un par quartier, mais cela supposerait une armée d'animateurs.

Les objectifs des écoles de devoirs doivent tenir compte de la contrainte scolaire et de la réalité de l'échec scolaire. Les enfants du milieu populaire (belges et surtout immigrés) échouent souvent à l'école parce qu'on n'y reconnaît pas leur langue et leur culture propre, parce que la pédagogie, même rénovée, ne s'inscrit pas dans leur vie ni dans leurs systèmes de représentation mais dans la vie et les normes dominantes. L'école sélectionne, reproduisant une société inégale: ceux qui réussissent à sauter les obstacles culturels auront une place reconnue, voire une position dominante, tandis que les autres, aiguillés vers l'enseignement professionnel (on «descend» en professionnel), sont promis aux tâches manuelles ou à l'exclusion sociale pure et simple. Ainsi l'école renforce les discriminations culturelles, sociales, économiques[8].

La lutte contre l'échec scolaire est donc un premier objectif de l'école de devoirs. En partant des travaux scolaires, en remontant aux préalables, il s'agit de permettre la compréhension des mécanismes linguistiques ou mathématiques. En rapport avec la lutte contre l'échec scolaire, nous tentons de développer des moyens d'expression propres aux enfants de milieu populaire et une ouverture à l'analyse de société. Mais la contrainte scolaire est si forte qu'il est difficile et même souvent impossible de s'en détacher et de prendre assez de recul pour introduire les éléments d'analyse que nous souhaiterions.

Premier bilan

Un premier bilan de l'alphabétisation des adultes immigrés et des écoles de devoirs nous conduit déjà à des questions fondamentales sur la valeur effective de notre action au-delà des objectifs déclarés, sincèrement déclarés. On peut observer des résultats.

Des adultes immigrés progressent dans la maîtrise du français, renforcent leurs capacités d'expression, participent même à des actions de

défense de leurs droits. Ainsi, à Hensies, un groupe de Turcs se mobilisent pour défendre leurs logements après une menace d'expropriation.

Des enfants réussissent mieux à l'école, ou connaissent des échecs moins graves. Ils n'en sont pas moins orientés vers l'enseignement professionnel. N'en avons-nous pas retrouvé certains, quelques années plus tard, dans une formation pour jeunes chômeurs que nous avons organisée?

Une certaine conscience collective se développe ou s'approfondit autour de l'immigration, dans des quartiers, des familles, des réseaux associatifs.

Mais, en même temps, nous touchons bien peu de monde par rapport à la population potentiellement intéressée. Nous n'apportons pas de réelle solution aux problèmes globaux qui sont posés. Fondamentalement, rien ne change. Il apparaît même clairement que la majorité des personnes que nous souhaiterions contacter se désintéresse carrément de notre action. Il y a conjonction entre leur désintérêt et la faiblesse de nos moyens. Quelle est donc l'utilité d'une action sur une frange aussi réduite (relativement) de la population supposée être intéressée? Pour le dire crûment, les «analphabètes» ne veulent pas être alphabétisés. Ce n'est pas leur projet, c'est le nôtre. Et ceux que nous touchons le moins, ce sont précisément ceux qui devraient, selon nous, être prioritairement touchés: les analphabètes les plus exclus. Nous poursuivons une chimère.

La mobilisation autour d'un projet de libération est bien faible. L'idéologie de la consommation individuelle marque fortement l'ensemble de la société, y compris les milieux populaires. Les médias de masse les atteignent bien plus que nous ne pouvons le faire nous-mêmes. Comment communiquer? Même l'alphabétisation est plus un objet consommable qu'un projet mobilisateur. Et quand on parvient à élever le niveau de conscience sans avoir les moyens de l'action et du changement, on aboutit à une nouvelle et plus profonde démobilisation.

Comment communiquer à partir d'une offre d'alphabétisation qui, par définition, est basée sur un regard négatif sur le public décrit comme analphabète, donc démuni culturellement, socialement, économiquement, politiquement? Ils sont vus à travers leurs manques, manque de capacité linguistique et manque de tout, alors qu'ils sont munis de culture, d'expérience, de réflexions, de rêves, même si ceux-ci sont tronqués, agressés, amputés par un rapport de force culturel et symbolique défavorable.

Une dignité est pourtant possible. Elle doit pouvoir émerger, mais elle n'en trouve pas le moyen. L'alphabétisation n'est pas celui qui convient. Le point de départ est ailleurs, non encore formulé. L'alphabétisation délimite et renforce la distance qu'elle prétend combler.

LA DEUXIÈME ÉPOQUE

Pour mieux affronter les contradictions analysées, nous tentons une nouvelle démarche, plus globale. L'alphabétisation est comprise dans un processus éducatif plus complexe où l'essentiel est de rencontrer les éléments moteurs: ce qui fait courir les gens, ce qui les met en route, ce qui organise leurs comportements, leurs stratégies de parole, ce qui est susceptible de les sortir de l'isolement, de les rassembler, de les faire agir. Dès lors, peu importe par où l'on commence — par de l'alphabétisation, de la photo, du théâtre, de la formation professionnelle, de la danse, de la cuisine — pourvu que la pédagogie soit un constant élargissement de possibilités déjà présentes, du moins en germe: possibilités d'expression, d'analyse, de compréhension, d'action. L'activité de départ est un point d'accrochage, une manipulation destinée à faire apparaître les enjeux. La diversification est recherchée pour offrir davantage de portes d'entrée et rencontrer ainsi des attentes variées. C'est ainsi qu'outre l'alphabétisation et les écoles de devoirs, que nous poursuivons, diverses activités vont voir le jour.

Des activités multiples

• Activités d'expression culturelle

— Le *Théâtre Alpha,* né d'un groupe d'alphabétisation, puis élargi à d'autres participants, est un théâtre-action. Deux pièces seront débattues, pensées, rédigées, montées, créées, représentées par le groupe. La première, *Le rêve d'une valise*, présente l'histoire vécue de plusieurs immigrés et traite de leur rêve jamais réalisé de rentrer au pays. Les représentations sont occasion de fêtes et de débats. Tout le processus de production est analysé, les représentations sont action de diffusion du débat. La seconde pièce, *Les haricots de la faim*, analyse la perte du pouvoir d'achat et ses conséquences dans les familles populaires. Sa production et sa représentation recourent à la même méthodologie.

— Le groupe de *danses folkloriques* pluriculturel ne fonctionnera pas très longtemps. Son projet était de provoquer une confrontation des identités diverses et une ouverture aux diverses histoires d'immigrés.

— *L'atelier photo* initie à une technique d'expression centrée sur l'image, mais dans une approche critique de la relativité du langage-image dominant dans notre société.

— *L'échange de cuisines* multiculturel poursuit un objectif analogue à celui des danses folkloriques.

• **Activités de formation** (outre l'alphabétisation et les écoles de devoirs)

— *L'atelier couture* permet de rassembler et d'établir des échanges, notamment entre les femmes turques, qu'aucune autre activité ne semble intéresser. C'est le moyen que nous avons trouvé pour établir le contact.

— La *formation de formateurs* en alphabétisation s'ouvre aussi vers une formation pédagogique plus large autour de la question clé: comment, à partir des diverses activités menées, conduire un débat permettant de dégager de nouveaux enjeux, de nouvelles actions, de nouveaux projets susceptibles d'agir pour une transformation des rapports sociaux.

Cette démarche, théoriquement séduisante, est cependant très difficile à concrétiser: très souvent, les animateurs ont beaucoup de mal à dépasser la bonne organisation de l'activité de départ pour dégager des pistes de travail permettant de progresser. On plafonne très vite. Pourtant, la formation des formateurs est un élément central.

— *L'aide au permis de conduire* est très populaire. Beaucoup de personnes du milieu populaire rencontrent d'importantes difficultés pour passer leur examen. Ces difficultés sont d'abord d'ordre linguistique. Les échecs répétés ont des conséquences financières assez lourdes. Nous permettons à presque tous ceux qui s'adressent à nous de réussir leur examen et d'obtenir leur permis.

Mais la contradiction apparaît vite. Une fois le permis réussi, les gens disparaissent: ils ont obtenu ce pour quoi ils s'adressaient à nous. Les propositions que nous leur faisons de poursuivre une démarche ultérieure avec nous ne rencontrent aucun succès. Notre objectif d'éducation permanente est dès lors détourné vers une simple offre de service de dépannage. Cela nous conduira à abandonner cette activité.

— Des *cours de langue arabe, turque et espagnole* pour ceux dont c'est la langue d'origine, mais aussi pour les Belges, sont un lieu de confrontation interculturelle. Ils visent à refondre la parole des immigrés sur leur langue d'origine. L'échange, le pluriculturel ne sont possibles qu'à condition de renforcer en même temps les identités, de redonner un statut positif aux cultures devenues, à travers l'immigration, arriérées, coupables. Ce n'est pas du passéisme, ni une tentative de restaurer des états antérieurs des cultures telles que les immigrés les ont laissées derrière eux au pays. C'est une tentative de tenir un discours particulier sur l'actualité des rapports immigrés — autochtones, ici et maintenant. La langue d'origine offre la possibilité d'une représentation de soi positive. Dans l'échange linguistique interculturel, lorsque des Belges apprennent et reconnaissent la langue de l'autre, ils passent eux aussi par le choc culturel; des bases sont posées pour des rapports sociaux nouveaux intégrant la différence.

— Une *formation professionnelle,* destinée prioritairement à des jeunes chômeurs ayant échoué à l'école (en rupture d'école), comporte des ateliers et cours de mécanique, électricité, vidéo, photo, couture, artisanat, tricot, maçonnerie, dactylo, comptabilité, informatique. Ces ateliers et cours techniques sont complétés par des mises à niveau en français et mathématiques et par des cours d'anglais, d'actualité et de droit. L'accent est mis sur l'insertion sociale, mais aussi sur la formation à l'analyse de société, à l'action pour les droits fondamentaux.

Cette formation correspond à une attente certaine. Elle apporte incontestablement une remotivation, une mise à niveau, une nouvelle chance pour des chômeurs marqués par un échec scolaire précédent. Mais elle n'ouvre quasiment aucune perspective réelle d'emploi valable. Si 33 p. 100 environ des «stagiaires» trouvent soit un emploi, soit une autre formation plus approfondie après la formation chez nous, il faut bien dire qu'il y a tous les autres qui retournent au chômage, et aussi que les emplois trouvés sont des emplois généralement peu gratifiants (intérims, mi-temps, petits boulots). L'enthousiasme fait place alors au découragement et au scepticisme.

— Des séances de *formation sociopolitique* portant notamment sur les relations Nord-Sud. Ce type d'action débouche par exemple sur le jumelage de notre association avec une école pilote au Nicaragua. En octobre 1987, nous avons organisé une semaine Nord-Sud, en collaboration avec d'autres organisations.

• Activités à caractère social

— Une *bourse aux vêtements* recycle des vêtements de seconde main. Elle offre aux familles populaires des vêtements à bon marché. Ouverte en permanence, elle est un lieu de rencontre pour les plus démunis. La difficulté est de dépasser le stade de la vente ou de l'entraide sociale pour entrer dans une démarche d'éducation permanente ou de formation.

— Des *permanences sociales et juridiques* pour les immigrés sont mises sur pied. Elles attirent également les familles populaires belges. Elles débouchent sur un projet collectif avec des familles du «quart monde»: les *Ateliers économiques populaires*. L'objectif de ceux-ci est de regrouper des familles populaires exclues afin qu'elles gèrent elles-mêmes et solidairement leur survie, plutôt que de dépendre exclusivement des services sociaux et des centres publics d'aide sociale (CPAS)[9]. Ces ateliers consistent en diverses activités à caractère économique gérées par les familles elles-mêmes: jardinage, recyclage de bois, confitures, repas, salle de vente de meubles, brocante, travaux de tapissage et peinture, recyclage de vêtements. L'équipe est un lieu d'apprentissage de la vie

de groupe, de la gestion d'un projet, de la comptabilité, du français écrit. Les évaluations hebdomadaires sont le cadre de formations sociologiques sur le tas.

Mais les conflits sont vite aigus. La solidarité entre les plus exclus est difficile. Beaucoup recherchent avant tout leur avantage personnel immédiat. Le travail sur le moyen terme est difficile. Le groupe se défait facilement.

En outre, les relations entre le personnel salarié et les bénévoles issus des familles du quart monde sont souvent conflictuelles à cause des différences dans les statuts et dans le degré d'engagement dans le projet. La question se pose sans cesse de déterminer qui est maître du projet.

• Activités à caractère économique

— *L'autre librairie* était une librairie coopérative. Elle n'a pas tenu le coup.

— Un groupe de stagiaires et de formateurs de la formation de jeunes chômeurs ont créé une association appelée *R — récupération* qui s'occupe de recyclage des déchets ménagers. Elle est actuellement autonome et indépendante du groupe l'Alpha.

• Participation à des réseaux d'action

Notre association participe à diverses actions, par exemple à un Comité pour la défense des droits des immigrés, à une Concertation pour la paix, à des actions de défense des travailleurs du socioculturel (lutte contre les statuts de travail précaire dans notre secteur), à des réseaux de lutte contre la pauvreté, à des actions de solidarité avec le tiers monde.

Des emplois précaires

La deuxième période est marquée par un accroissement important des activités. D'une part, toutes les activités n'ont pas été organisées simultanément. Certaines ont eu une vie plus courte que d'autres du fait de l'intérêt des participants, de nos possibilités d'assurer un suivi, de réaliser nos objectifs éducatifs. D'autre part, l'accroissement des activités a été possible parce que nous avons demandé au ministère de l'Emploi — et obtenu — des travailleurs en statut précaire. Ainsi, au début de 1990, notre personnel se composait de 22 personnes sous contrat TCT, 4 permanents, un FBI (Fonds budgétaire interdépartemental)[10].

Ce type de statut de travail appelle beaucoup de critiques. Plusieurs aspects en concrétisent la précarité:

— Le principe de la tournante: il s'agit ici de faire travailler un chômeur pendant un certain temps, puis de le renvoyer au chômage et de le remplacer par un autre chômeur.

  Théoriquement, il devrait retrouver du travail, mais le marché du travail est quasiment inaccessible aux chômeurs de longue durée peu qualifiés;

— Ces programmes cherchent à résorber le chômage et non à renforcer l'action des associations; dès lors, la qualification ou l'absence de qualification des travailleurs correspond rarement aux tâches d'alphabétisation ou autres de l'association. Et lorsque la formation s'acquiert dans le cadre des associations, celle-ci arrive à son terme au moment où les travailleurs quittent leur emploi. Elle n'est d'ailleurs pas valorisée sur le marché du travail;

— Les droits des travailleurs sont réduits. Par exemple, sur le plan barémique, leur ancienneté ne débute qu'au 1er janvier 1987. Les années antérieures ne sont pas prises en considération[11];

— Le statut instable fait que les travailleurs sont souvent traités comme des travailleurs de seconde zone. Ils relèvent d'ailleurs rarement d'une commission paritaire patronale/syndicale.

Au point de départ, l'association comme le travailleur ont le sentiment que, malgré la précarité, cela vaut mieux que rien, mieux que le chômage, mieux que l'impossibilité de réaliser des activités socialement utiles et répondant à des besoins réels. Tout le monde admet que ce n'est pas l'idéal, mais y trouve un certain avantage: associations, travailleurs, pouvoirs publics, syndicats, entreprises.

Ainsi perdure, se réforme, se renforce même un statut qui parasite à la fois les associations, qui auraient besoin d'un personnel stable et formé, les travailleurs, qui passent de chômage en sous-statut, se marginalisant et se précarisant de plus en plus définitivement, la politique de l'emploi, qui n'est plus qu'une politique de résorption du chômage, la politique sociale et culturelle, qui est à la remorque de la précédente.

Deuxième bilan

• Des acquis

— Quantitativement, l'élargissement et la diversification des activités ont permis de toucher un plus grand nombre de personnes, jusqu'à 300 par

an. Même si leur participation était souvent irrégulière, beaucoup de gens participaient à la mouvance de notre action, elle-même liée à l'action d'autres associations. L'extension est également géographique: nous sommes implantés dans plusieurs localités de la région.

Évidemment, les personnes touchées ne sont pas toutes également engagées. Nous pouvons parler d'une action en cercles concentriques, depuis les consommateurs de services sociaux ou éducatifs jusqu'aux personnes ou groupes porteurs du projet, intéressés par ses objectifs, en passant par des niveaux intermédiaires de participation. À tous, nous tentons de présenter l'alphabétisation comme un projet collectif de changement social à travers l'éducation permanente, à partir de la diversité de leurs réalités. Les réponses sont bien sûr variables, complexes.

— Une méthodologie populaire a été conçue qui fonctionne d'abord à partir de l'alphabétisation, puis est élargie et adaptée à d'autres points de départ, à d'autres activités. Elle vise non seulement l'insertion dans un vécu particulier, mais aussi l'expression et l'analyse. Il s'agit de «dire une parole» et «d'agir une action» sur la réalité sociale qui nous concerne. La démarche pédagogique est sociolinguistique. Elle a été consignée par écrit (en partie du moins) dans des fiches pédagogiques. Elle est appliquée dans la formation de formateurs à l'association même ainsi que dans d'autres associations.

— Des progressions individuelles et collectives sont évidentes, tant pour des «stagiaires» de quelques mois que pour des «participants» engagés à plus long terme et formant le noyau des «militants» du projet. D'autres progressions sont observables, même si elles ne sont guère quantifiables: augmentation des capacités linguistiques, techniques, professionnelles; mise à niveau des connaissances de base; augmentation des connaissances juridiques, sociologiques, sociopolitiques; alphabétisation, apprentissage du français par des immigrés ou des réfugiés politiques; augmentation des capacités d'expression verbale ou non verbale; confiance en soi, valorisation de l'image de soi, autonomisation, responsabilisation; capacité d'analyse, de débat, d'action; conception et gestion de projets; conscience critique des mécanismes sociaux; actions collectives sur le milieu et la région; intégration dans d'autres formations et actions.

— Parmi les participants à la «formation professionnelle continue», environ un sur trois trouve un emploi ou une formation d'un niveau supérieur à celui que nous offrons. Mais la plupart des emplois sont précaires. La formation professionnelle de l'Alpha Mons-Borinage est destinée prioritairement à des jeunes en rupture d'école, ayant expérimenté l'échec. Nous pouvons les (re)mettre en route vers l'insertion socioprofessionnelle, mais les filtres restent très importants pour les plus exclus scolairement: au-delà de la formation, l'accès à un emploi

valable est le plus souvent impossible. On attend des miracles de la formation, quand le marché de l'emploi est bouché!

— Des personnes et des familles du quart monde ont vécu des expériences de solidarité, particulièrement dans les Ateliers économiques populaires. Elles y ont acquis des capacités de gestion et d'organisation, ont organisé elles-mêmes un projet collectif de survie qui les rendait moins dépendantes des services sociaux. Elles y ont trouvé l'occasion de se former et d'analyser. Mais on en restait à la survie. À un moment donné, les perspectives se bouchent ici aussi.

— Un important travail de formation de formateurs a été réalisé pour des formateurs en alphabétisation, des travailleurs du social, des enseignants, dans notre région et dans d'autres régions de la Communauté française de Belgique. La formation de formateurs est fondée sur une analyse de la langue comme lieu où s'expriment les rapports de force qui s'affrontent dans la société. La formation n'est pas simple enseignement d'un système formel neutre. La langue renvoie à une parole avec laquelle elle a des rapports dialectiques: la forme est sans cesse utilisée en fonction d'intérêts politiques, sociaux, économiques, culturels, symboliques. Si les codes linguistiques populaires sont spécifiques, la pédagogie de la langue populaire sera aussi spécifique.

— Dans l'opinion publique, l'association Alpha a promu une «image de marque» contradictoire et souvent contestée, mais qui amène à poser des questions fondamentales sur l'exclusion sociale, le droit de tous au savoir, l'immigration, le racisme, le pluriculturel, la solidarité, le modèle de société. À tout moment, nous affirmons que l'alphabétisation, la formation, l'éducation, l'action sociale sont des actes politiques qui agissent sur l'orientation de l'ensemble de la société.

• Des difficultés innombrables

Le projet de l'Alpha Mons-Borinage ne tient que contre vents et marées. Les difficultés sont si nombreuses qu'il nous semble souvent qu'il faut être fou pour continuer à agir dans les conditions qui nous sont imposées.

— Du côté des pouvoirs publics: retards importants dans le paiement de subsides. Or, il nous est impossible de nous financer vraiment par nous-mêmes. Le personnel, certes nombreux, est essentiellement un personnel sous-statutaire, donc marqué par le provisoire et l'insécurité, là où il faudrait une action profonde et à moyen terme. Le statut dévalorisant est cause de démotivation. L'obligation de recruter principalement du personnel peu qualifié n'est pas compatible avec l'action d'alphabétisation, qui réclame de la compétence. Nous avons donc beaucoup de problèmes en ce qui concerne la qualité de la formation offerte en alphabétisation.

En juin 1990, la Région wallone a remplacé le système TCT (Troisième circuit de travail) par un nouveau système de statuts précaires (le PRIME). Celui-ci impose une intervention importante du promoteur dans le salaire des travailleurs. Nous ne pouvons en assumer le coût. De plus, le nouveau programme représentant un renforcement de la précarisation des emplois, les travailleurs de l'association ont refusé d'être transférés du programme TCT au PRIME.

Résultat : nous sommes passés de 28 emplois à 2. Et pour poursuivre, il nous faut de nouveau recourir au bénévolat. Nous sommes contraints à une restructuration de nos activités et à continuer plus que jamais avec des bouts de ficelle.

— Nos objectifs déclarés d'éducation permanente vont à contre-courant de la «culture de masse» qui marque aussi bien les formateurs et les animateurs que le public. Le projet de mobilisation pour un changement social se heurte à l'idéologie et aux valeurs de consommation. L'idée de liberté elle-même n'est-elle pas devenue objet consommable? Face au marché du travail devenu arrogant, aux inégalités renforcées, l'exclusion est massive. Nous la côtoyons tous les jours. Aucune perspective réelle n'est offerte aux exclus. Pour l'instant, nous agissons comme des résistants qui appellent d'autres résistants. Il est vrai que chez beaucoup le découragement est profond.

— La crise et le renforcement des exclusions ont augmenté les demandes d'assistanat. Le travail en partenariat avec les populations, l'éducation permanente, l'organisation d'une formation à la critique sociale, l'action sur les causes des problèmes rencontrés ont tendance à être reportés à plus tard pour répondre à l'urgence. Le sens même de l'éducation permanente, qui était vue comme une éducation à l'analyse critique et à l'action de changement social, se transforme en une formation visant l'intégration, voire la simple insertion sociale.

À l'Alpha Mons-Borinage, nous ressentons que cette pression pour l'assistanat d'urgence empêche toute véritable réflexion stratégique. Nous parons au plus pressé. Faut-il continuer ainsi?

— Une difficulté non négligeable vient aussi du fait qu'une attitude d'apprentissage permanent, de redéfinition continue, est difficile à tenir. La majorité des gens, tant parmi les formateurs que parmi les participants, après une période de recherche et de progression, s'installent vite dans le confort des petits pouvoirs acquis.

Pour avancer encore, il faudrait sans doute ouvrir des perspectives plus larges et plus motivantes. Mais les relais manquent.

— Notre action a beaucoup souffert d'un manque de relais vraiment dynamiques vers d'autres secteurs de la société. On nous reproche parfois de constituer un ghetto, de vouloir trop en faire par nous-mêmes, à tel point que notre projet en devient partiellement ingérable.

Il est difficile de trouver des relais vraiment ouverts aux spécificités des exclus, à leur histoire, à leur identité. Des changements sont indispensables dans le mode d'intervention de beaucoup d'organismes qui fonctionnent de façon très bureaucratisée et qui, de ce fait, renforcent les mécanismes d'exclusion bien plus qu'ils ne les corrigent.

— Les 6 p. 100 de pauvres vivant en Communauté française de Belgique ne sont quasiment pas touchés par notre action. Les «analphabètes» les plus marginalisés par rapport à l'écrit non plus. Le public touché est celui qui connaît déjà une mobilité sociale. Ces difficultés nous sont communes avec beaucoup d'autres associations. Faute d'une stratégie de communication particulière adaptée aux paroles et à l'intérêt propres aux exclus, nous ne pourrons pas avancer. L'approche ne peut être seulement technique. Elle est culturelle avant tout. Allons-nous investir dans ce type de culturel?

Au terme de la deuxième période, le bilan est-il donc tout noir? Non. J'ai souligné les indéniables acquis, mais on ne peut pas éviter de reconnaître que, pour une bonne part, on se heurte à des murs. Mais l'histoire n'est pas finie.

ET MAINTENANT?

Nous sommes deux travailleurs appointés: un permanent, un FBI[10]. Une dizaine de personnes travaillent en outre à titre bénévole. Nos activités sont en cours de restructuration sur la base de cette contrainte d'emplois et aussi sur la base de notre évaluation plus globale. Comment surmonter les obstacles? Quelles actions développer prioritairement? Comment, à partir de celles-ci, agir aussi au niveau global, celui des enjeux même de l'alphabétisation et de l'éducation permanente?

Deux secteurs subsistent actuellement: l'alphabétisation et la lutte contre la pauvreté.

L'alphabétisation

Elle comporte trois niveaux d'action.

• Les cours d'alphabétisation

Les cours d'alphabétisation continuent d'être offerts tant aux immigrés qu'aux Belges. Nous commençons à nous organiser pour étendre,

dans notre région, le réseau d'offre de cours en collaboration avec d'autres associations ou organismes: écoles, bibliothèques, centres publics d'aide sociale, centres de consultation pour les nourrissons, Comité de protection de la jeunesse, associations, etc.

A côté des cours organisés chez nous, nous souhaitons que des cours aient lieu ailleurs, là où d'autres communications avec les personnes et les groupes exclus existent déjà et pourraient être amplifiées par l'introduction d'une démarche d'alphabétisation-écriturisation[12]-lecturisation. Nous pourrons de la sorte, espérons-nous, apporter de nouvelles dimensions à notre pédagogie sociolinguistique qui vise à l'émergence d'une parole et d'une langue, orales et écrites, les plus étroitement liées à une histoire concrète, à des rapports sociaux effectifs. L'enjeu stratégique est d'établir et de construire des communications, non d'abord d'alphabétiser. Encore faut-il établir des communications où les paroles exclues soient reconnues au point d'être situées au centre de la démarche. Introduire dans la pédagogie un questionnement simple, mais aux réponses complexes, ouvrirait de nouvelles perspectives, débloquerait sans doute un certain nombre de situations qui apparaissent sans issue: qui dit quoi? Où? Quand? A qui? Comment? Pourquoi? Ce nouveau questionnement ne rend pas vaine l'action précise d'alphabétisation: elle peut lui donner une nouvelle ampleur[13]. En outre, il suppose que les différents acteurs de la lutte contre l'exclusion s'accordent sur des stratégies communes. C'est là l'objet d'un travail de formation-action.

• La formation-action

Il s'agit de formation-action dans la mesure où le processus de formation vise la mise en place de stratégies nouvelles. Elle s'organise à deux niveaux: formation de formateurs, animateurs et relais pour la lutte contre l'exclusion culturelle; formation de formateurs en alphabétisation.

La formation de formateurs, animateurs et relais pour la lutte contre l'exclusion culturelle s'adresse à divers acteurs sociaux: animateurs, éducateurs, bibliothécaires, syndicalistes, infirmières de la petite enfance, parents, etc. Il s'agit d'établir un processus de formation lié à l'action de divers types d'acteurs dans la communication / non-communication avec les populations exclues, de telle façon que leur pratique intègre la dimension de lutte contre l'analphabétisme et l'illettrisme[14] comme facteur de réinvention de la communication. Le centre d'alphabétisation n'est donc plus le seul lieu où on renvoie la personne repérée comme analphabète ou illettrée (et qui d'ailleurs, le plus souvent, ne s'y présente pas); il agit en interaction avec d'autres lieux disposés, eux aussi, à réinventer leur stratégie en tant qu'agents de communication.

Nous sommes au tout début de cette démarche. D'autres associations cherchent à travailler dans le même sens. Les contacts que nous avons

établis jusqu'ici nous permettront de commencer un cycle de formation-action de ce type à partir de septembre 1991.

Par ailleurs, au Service de la formation des animateurs du ministère de la Communauté française[15], un projet de formation destiné aux différents types d'animateurs socioculturels et intégrant l'alphabétisation est en préparation. Nous sommes associés à ce travail préparatoire. Ce projet d'une cinquantaine d'heures de formation s'adressera à des acteurs susceptibles de relayer de telles approches dans l'ensemble du territoire de la Communauté française de Belgique.

La formation d'alphabétiseurs vise l'acquisition de capacités méthodologiques dans une perspective sociolinguistique. Elle cherche l'interaction constante entre pratique et théorie en appliquant une méthode en boucles (première représentation des pratiques → approches théoriques → pistes stratégiques et pédagogiques → expérimentation → évaluation et analyse des pratiques → renforcement théorique → renforcement des stratégies et pédagogies, etc.).

Nos interventions dans la formation d'alphabétiseurs comprennent la formation initiale et continue des formateurs de notre association, la formation offerte par nous à des associations, la formation à la demande d'autres associations, la participation en tant que concepteur ou formateur à des sessions de formation coordonnées par ou avec d'autres partenaires, par exemple:

— Une formation de formateurs en alphabétisation de la province de Namur[16]: cycle de 150 h de cours + 60 h de stage pratique donnant accès à une attestation de réussite ou de suivi des cours. Cette formation est importante dans la mesure où elle ouvre la voie à une compétence effective et à une reconnaissance pour les professionnels de l'alphabétisation;

— Une formation d'alphabétiseurs de la province du Hainaut: cycle de 220 h (dont 60 h de stage) en préparation et dont le démarrage est prévu pour octobre 1991;

— Une formation de cadres de l'alphabétisation organisée par le Service de la formation des animateurs du ministère de la Communauté française: cycle de 50 h en préparation et dont le démarrage est prévu pour novembre 1991;

— Une formation de formateurs dans une Entreprise d'apprentissage professionnel (EAP)[17], d'une durée d'environ 100 h. Il s'agit ici d'une formation approfondie aux techniques d'alphabétisation et à la méthodologie sociolinguistique.

- **La création du Comité Mons-Borinage de lutte contre l'analphabétisme et l'exclusion culturelle.**

Ce comité permet de rassembler lui aussi divers types d'acteurs sociaux pour établir des passerelles entre les divers niveaux d'action, mais aussi et surtout pour tenter d'établir des stratégies concertées. Ce groupe, encore à ses débuts, est destiné à jouer un rôle actif dans la mise sur pied de réseaux locaux dans la région de Mons-Borinage.

Nous avons commencé une enquête sur le développement du plaisir de lire auprès d'enseignants, de bibliothécaires, de parents, d'élèves. Nous en ferons un outil de base pour discuter de stratégies communes, notamment avec certaines écoles et bibliothèques.

Sans renoncer aux cours d'alphabétisation, en les développant au contraire, nous avons choisi pourtant une orientation moins centrée sur notre association comme lieu, trop exclusif, de lutte contre l'analphabétisme. La solution n'est pas chez nous, elle est dans la société: y tisser des réseaux est donc essentiel, à condition toutefois de clarifier le sens de l'action à entreprendre. Pour éclaircir celui-ci, une conception de la langue et de la pédagogie sociolinguistique, une recherche-action sur la façon de l'intégrer dans toute action d'éducation, d'animation, de lutte contre l'exclusion culturelle et sociale constitue un enjeu central.

L'action de lutte contre la pauvreté

Cette action comporte notamment:

— des Ateliers économiques populaires de solidarité pour la survie (voir plus haut);

— un accompagnement social et juridique des familles en difficulté;

— une formation de base à l'écriture, à la vie en groupe, à la dactylographie, à la comptabilité, etc.;

— un atelier d'écriture;

— une bibliothèque de rue pour les enfants (une animatrice lit dans la rue avec les enfants);

— un atelier de couture;

— des séances thématiques sur des enjeux de société concernant les familles, les personnes de milieu populaire;

— un réseau de collaboration avec d'autres organisations ou associations;

— un travail d'enquête dans les quartiers proches.

Nous souhaitons coordonner les deux types d'actions: celle, plus sociale, de lutte contre la pauvreté élargit le terrain de l'alphabétisation, alors que celle-ci, plus culturelle, offre des outils précis de compréhension, d'analyse, d'expression, d'action, outils essentiels à l'autonomie, à la responsabilisation, à la communication et donc à la solution des problèmes posés sur le plan social. Nous évaluons de façon permanente notre action sous ses diverses dimensions.

Toutefois, l'articulation du social et du culturel reste insuffisante: elle ne parvient pas à résoudre les problèmes de pauvreté. La boucle action sociale-éducation permanente, qui au départ paraît dynamique, ouvre très souvent à la conscience plus aiguë des impasses. La gestion en circuit fermé de la pauvreté est bel et bien un facteur de reproduction de l'exclusion. Les pauvres se heurtent à trop d'obstacles (sous-emploi, santé, logement, éducation, police, revenus, administration, mythe de la consommation, etc.).

À notre niveau, nous pensons que la coordination en réseaux est nécessaire pour parvenir à une action globale et en profondeur, mais aussi à une évaluation sur l'opportunité des méthodes utilisées: l'offre de services aux plus démunis est-elle une approche susceptible de favoriser des démarches autonomisantes? Face à des situations extrêmes, elle est souvent la seule façon d'exprimer une solidarité concrète, mais elle approfondit la dépendance et ne débouche que difficilement sur une démarche de formation. D'emblée, les relations instaurées soit par une offre de service, soit par une offre d'éducation sont de nature différente et sont a priori contradictoires. Et lorsque nous offrons les deux parallèlement, c'est généralement l'intérêt immédiat qui l'emporte.

Nous souhaitons dépasser la gestion de la pauvreté et de la précarité, mais cela déborde les compétences d'une seule association.

CONCLUSION: DES RÉSEAUX, CONDITION NÉCESSAIRE MAIS NON SUFFISANTE

L'histoire de l'Alpha Mons-Borinage peut se résumer comme une suite de tentatives couronnées de résultats, mais de résultats limités et qui aboutissent aussi à des impasses. Avec beaucoup d'autres, nous avons lutté pour un changement social, non seulement sur le plan des idées, mais sur le terrain, dans la vie des gens. Il nous apparaît maintenant que beaucoup d'entre eux et beaucoup d'entre nous vivent moins bien, avec des perspectives plus bouchées.

Globalement, la pauvreté a augmenté dans nos sociétés (44 millions de pauvres en Europe; environ 20 p. 100 de situations socioprofessionnelles précaires; beaucoup de jeunes survivent, comme une génération sacrifiée,

etc.). L'aggravation des problèmes de la société se vérifie dans le quotidien. Notre action aboutit au mieux, dans la plupart des cas, à mieux intégrer à la marginalité, à une marginalité qui englobe des couches plus larges de la société.

Dans les associations d'alphabétisation, d'éducation permanente, d'action sociale, nous sommes nombreux à nous interroger aujourd'hui sur le sens de notre action: sommes-nous une sorte de police socioculturelle destinée à encadrer les exclus? Sommes-nous des services de suppléance par rapport aux carences du système social? Sommes-nous des facteurs d'intégration à la société? Sommes-nous des agents de changement social? Nous sommes nombreux à penser qu'un changement social fondamental est nécessaire si l'on veut apporter une amélioration sensible à la vie quotidienne des exclus, si l'on veut surtout sortir de l'exclusion. Une pédagogie fondée sur la libération des paroles aujourd'hui marginales et sur le développement de nouvelles dignités ne peut trouver d'issue satisfaisante sans modification des rapports sociaux plus généraux.

Le regroupement en réseaux pluridisciplinaires, coordonnant de façon précise, par la mise en place de stratégies concertées, l'action d'enseignants, d'alphabétiseurs, de travailleurs sociaux, d'animateurs de la culture, etc., est certainement une condition nécessaire pour sortir des impasses actuelles. Pourtant, cela ne suffit pas. On ne peut échapper à une remise en cause sociopolitique plus globale, sinon on ne fait que déplacer l'alibi.

Les pouvoirs publics ont une responsabilité précise dans la détermination de politiques qui réalisent effectivement des priorités socio-éducatives. L'associatif peut agir ici en tant que mouvement social, exerçant une pression, instaurant un débat, revendiquant une négociation sur les priorités à établir dans la gestion de l'ensemble de la société. Priorité au marché et au PNB, le reste pour la culture, l'éducation, le social, l'emploi? Des associations commencent à se regrouper autour de ces enjeux de nature politique[18], à se définir comme un pôle actif dans la société, à penser des stratégies politiques, à établir des alliances.

Dispositifs de formation améliorés, réseaux, détermination d'autres priorités politiques ne changeront cependant rien de fondamental si tout cela est conçu et réalisé pour les exclus et non par eux. Les dispositifs les mieux adaptés et les plus indispensables ne feront jamais que ménager des conditions d'accès à la parole par les exclus eux-mêmes. Ceux-ci sont les principaux acteurs de leur libération. La démocratie n'est pas le droit de vote, elle n'est pas un corps d'idées généreuses, elle n'est pas un programme pour les droits des exclus, elle est communication en acte. Les exclus n'ont pas à être intégrés par nous, mais reconnus comme des acteurs sociaux capables de dire et d'orienter la société au même titre que tous les autres acteurs. Introduire cette finalité dans nos stratégies pédagogiques et politiques est sans doute l'enjeu principal.

Les exclus ne sont pas analphabètes comme on est manchot. Ils sont riches de savoirs, d'expériences, d'histoire. Là serait le moteur d'une autre pédagogie. Mais le pédagogue se situe souvent comme un contrôleur du savoir et du savoir-faire normés. D'autres démarches plus créatrices existent, mais dans la marge. Le rôle des réseaux serait sans doute de les amplifier et les généraliser.

La pédagogie rencontrera la politique. L'alphabétisation qui est actuellement un facteur, parmi d'autres, de reproduction des inégalités, pourrait alors renverser sa logique et devenir parole de liberté pour la société, formatrice et éducative non seulement pour les exclus, mais pour tous ceux qui apprendront à communiquer avec eux. Mais à ce moment, elle ne sera sans doute plus l'alphabétisation.

NOTES

1. Présenté par Lalita Ramdas, « Pourquoi devions-nous être alphabétisés? », dans *L'alphabétisation en pays industrialisés. Point de mire sur la pratique*, séminaire international, Toronto, 13-15 octobre 1987, Conseil international d'éducation des adultes, Toronto, Margaret Gayfert éditrice, 1987, p. 19-20.

2. On peut relever, par exemple, qu'environ 3 000 personnes seulement sont touchées par l'ensemble des associations d'alphabétisation sur 300 000 à 500 000 analphabètes estimés dans la Communauté française de Belgique. S'y ajoute la constatation que les personnes touchées sont rarement les plus exclues du savoir, notamment les analphabètes dits complets.

3. Freire, Paulo, *Pédagogie des opprimés*, Paris, Maspero, 1977; *L'éducation, pratique de la liberté*, Paris, Cerf, 1975. Voir aussi Jean-Paul Hautecœur, dans *Introduction aux pratiques et politiques d'alphabétisation*: « Paulo Freire: politiques d'alphabétisation ou alphabétisation politique? », Montréal, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1987, p. 295-325.

4. Bernstein, Basil, *Langage et classes sociales*, Paris, Minuit, 1975; William Labov, *Sociolinguistique*, Paris, Minuit, 1976.

5. Bourdieu, Pierre, *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*, Paris, Minuit, 1979; *Le sens pratique*, Paris, Minuit, 1980; et particulièrement: *Ce que parler veut dire — L'économie des échanges linguistiques*, Paris, Fayard, 1982.

6. Publications de l'Alpha Mons-Borinage: *Situation sociale et enseignement linguistique; Fiches pour l'apprentissage du françdis; Progression et évaluation; L'apprentissage du français de base (aux travailleurs immigrés ne connaissant pas le français); Ecole de devoirs — Pour une poignée d'idées en plus; Calcul, mathématique — Initiation, mise à niveau; Apprentissage oral — Apprentissage écrit.*

7. Marissal, Véronique, « Les écoles des devoirs dans la prévention de l'echec scolaire », dans *ALPHA 90 — Recherches en alphabétisation*, sous la direction de Jean-Paul Hautecœur, Québec, ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1990, p. 373.

8. Bastin, G., et Roosen, A., *L'école malade de l'échec scolaire (Pédagogies en développement. Pratiques méthodologiques)*, Bruxelles, 1990; Pierre Bourdieu *et al.*, *Les héritiers*, Paris, Minuit, 1964; Bourdieu, Pierre, et Passeron, Jean-Claude, *La reproduction*, Paris, Minuit, 1970; Snyders, G., *Ecole, classe et lutte des classes*, Paris, P.U.F., 1976.

9. Les centres publics d'aide sociale (CPAS) sont des organismes publics financés par les communes et par le ministère des Affaires sociales. Ils allouent aux personnes sans ressources un « minimex » (allocation mensuelle régulière) ou une aide sociale occasionnelle.

10. Principaux programmes de résorption du chômage utilisables par les associations:

    a) Chômeurs mis au travail (CMT): les chômeurs restent des chômeurs. Ils sont mis à la disposition d'une association (ou d'un pouvoir public) pour une période d'un an renouvelable. Le CMT a été supprimé en 1989 et englobé dans la formule ACS.

    b) Cadre spécial temporaire (CST): le chômeur obtient un contrat de travail à durée déterminée (souvent un an). Il obtient le revenu de base du niveau équivalent dans la fonction publique.

    c) Troisième circuit de travail (TCT): le chômeur obtient un contrat à durée indéterminée. Son revenu est le salaire de base du niveau équivalent dans la fonction publique. Une ancienneté a été appliquée seulement à partir du 1er janvier 1987.

    d) Actuellement, les formules CST et TCT ont été supprimées en Wallonie et remplacées par un nouveau système appelé PRIME (Programme régional d'insertion dans le marché de l'emploi). Celui-ci suppose une importante intervention du promoteur dans les salaires. Beaucoup d'associations ont donc dû renoncer à une grande partie des emplois à cause de leur

incapacité à assumer cette intervention. Par ailleurs, le ministre de la Région wallonne compétent en cette matière a supprimé un grand nombre de postes TCT. Au total, plus de 4 000 emplois ont été perdus sur un total de plus de 10 000.

e) Fonds budgétaire interdépartemental (FBI): le chômeur devient un travailleur à part entière. Sur la base d'une convention entre le ministre de l'Emploi et un autre ministre dont les moyens budgétaires ne suffisent pas à financer les emplois auxquels les associations ont droit dans le cadre des dispositions légales qui agréent leurs activités, le ministre de l'Emploi prend le financement de ces emplois en charge. Toutefois, cette convention interdépartementale est conclue pour des durées limitées (renouvelables) et l'intervention pour le salaire est plafonnée (actuellement à 590 000 FB, alors qu'un salaire minimum coûte plus de 800 000 FB au promoteur).

11. Autre mesure discriminatoire: il y a obligation de travailler deux ans dans un sous-statut pour obtenir une révision de son «code chômage» (code à partir duquel les allocations de chômage sont calculées; celles-ci sont de 55 p. 100 du dernier salaire durant la première année de chômage et de 35 p. 100 à partir de la deuxième année, sauf pour les chefs de ménage). Beaucoup de TCT recevaient une allocation de 35 p. 100 du dernier salaire au moment où ils ont été engagés. Les travailleurs «normaux» doivent travailler six mois avant d'obtenir la révision de leur code et donc de retrouver une allocation de 55 p. 100.

12. Au-delà de la simple capacité technique, il s'agit de l'accès à «l'acte d'écrire», l'acte de signifier par l'écrit des stratégies de positionnement social, de création de significations. Ceci est fondamental dans la recherche d'une pédagogie pour la démocratie en actes.

13. La démarche sociolinguistique proposée s'appuie sur un cadre théorique analysant les fonctions du langage. L'ensemble de la vie humaine, de la vie en société est langage. L'action sur les rapports humains est elle-même langage. Nos pratiques tireraient dès lors beaucoup de profit d'une meilleure perception des fonctions du langage en relation avec la communication (toutes les interactions complexes et contradictoires mises en jeu dans la communication), mais aussi à la non-communication (quand on parle; on parle aussi pour non communiquer, ne pas dire, se protéger...), en relation avec le désir, la pensée, la création de significations ou la relativisation du sens, le positionnement social ou la marginalisation, l'imposition de pouvoir ou sa remise en cause, la construction de l'autonomie ou sa subtile aliénation.

On peut renvoyer à beaucoup de recherches sur ces sujets, notamment:
— Jakobson, R., *Essais de linguistique générale*, Paris, Minuit, 1963 (chap. 11, Linguistique et poétique).
— Kristeva, J., *Le langage, cet inconnu*, Paris, Seuil, 1981.
— Schaff, A., *Langage et connaissance*, Paris, Anthropos, 1969.
— Barthes, R., *Leçon*, Paris, Seuil, 1978.
— Sapir, E., *Anthropologie*, Paris, Minuit, 1967.
— Bourdieu, P., *Ce que parler veut dire* (voir note 5).
— Bernstein, B., et Labov, W. (voir note 4).

14. Pour la distinction entre analphabétisme et illettrisme, je renvoie à Jean Foucambert: l'illettrisme touche environ 70 p. 100 de la population française qui ne peut lire de façon efficace un texte de niveau moyen, tandis que l'analphabétisme ne touche qu'une partie, la plus exclue, des illettrés.

15. La Belgique est devenue un Etat fédéral qui comporte trois régions (Wallonie, Flandre, Bruxelles), trois communautés (française, flamande, germanophone). La Communauté française de Belgique est dirigée par un Exécutif composé de quatre ministres. L'éducation permanente et la formation des animateurs dépendent de l'un de ceux-ci.

16. Formation organisée par l'Institut supérieur provincial de formation socio-éducative (anciennement Cours pour éducateurs en fonction).

17. Selon l'esprit qui a présidé à leur création, les Entreprises d'apprentissage professionnel sont à la fois des centres de formation professionnelle et des petites entreprises. Elles sont accessibles à des personnes (prioritairement des jeunes) qui n'ont pas de revenus professionnels, qui ne relèvent donc des CPAS (voir note 9).

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18. Voir, par exemple, le numéro spécial de la revue *Alternatives wallonnes, Monde associatif: la cinquième roue? De la question sociale à la société en question*, n° 73-74, 15 mars 1991.

L'ÉDUCATION DE BASE EN FLANDRE: DES ATOUTS, DES RISQUES

Gunter Gehre
Université catholique
Louvain, Belgique

INTRODUCTION

Pour les mouvements flamands d'alphabétisation, l'année 1990 a été un sommet dans deux domaines. En premier lieu, il y a eu la proclamation par les Nations Unies de l'Année internationale de l'alphabétisation (AIA) et, à cette occasion, la mise sur pied en Flandre d'un secrétariat provisoire. Ce secrétariat a assuré la coordination de nombreuses manifestations et a été chargé par la commission d'experts de l'AIA de publier un livre blanc. Ce livre blanc[1] contient plusieurs avis indiquant les pistes à suivre pour lutter efficacement contre l'analphabétisme en Flandre.

Il y a eu, parallèlement, une accélération dans le domaine politique. À l'issue d'un processus qui s'est étendu sur plusieurs années, le Vlaamse Raad a promulgué un décret «portant sur l'organisation de l'éducation de base pour adultes peu scolarisés[2]». Ce décret bouleverse profondément le paysage des structures d'apprentissage pour adultes peu scolarisés. Les activités d'alphabétisation ont également été entraînées dans ce mouvement : ces activités (en l'occurrence, l'apprentissage collectif de la lecture et de l'écriture) se sont retrouvées intégrées dans des structures plus larges.

Le présent texte a été rédigé dans le contexte de cette évolution. Nous esquissons d'abord l'historique des activités d'alphabétisation jusqu'à nos jours. Étant donné le bouleversement considérable de ce volet de la carte éducative, il faut également repenser en profondeur les activités d'alphabétisation elles-mêmes. Nous cherchons à situer ces activités (qui s'inscrivent dans l'éducation de base) dans l'ensemble des structures sociales et éducatives. À partir d'un certain nombre d'exemples concrets de coopération, nous essayons de définir le rapport entre l'«alphabétisation» et l'aide aux groupes défavorisés. Tout en constatant que cette constellation nouvelle présente de multiples possibilités d'aborder de manière plus intégrée la lutte contre l'analphabétisme, nous indiquerons les dangers et les lacunes des réglementations actuelles.

Le texte qui suit est écrit à partir d'une double position : d'une part, j'ai été pendant quelques années associé étroitement à différents aspects des activités d'alphabétisation. Je me suis frotté à cette occasion aux activités concrètes d'apprentissage collectif de la lecture et de l'écriture, mais j'ai aussi été obligé de faire face à différentes questions de nature politique

qui existaient avant la réglementation de l'éducation de base. Après cette période, j'ai continué à suivre de près toute l'évolution, bien qu'à quelque distance : cela me permet d'observer et de commenter sans passion les processus en cours.

ALPHABÉTISATION ET ÉDUCATION DE BASE

Les origines[3]

Ce n'est qu'à la fin des années 1970 que sont nés, en Flandre, les mouvements d'alphabétisation. On avait cru jusque-là (et on le crut encore par la suite) que l'obligation scolaire (qui date de 1914) constituait une garantie suffisante pour combattre l'analphabétisme. Aussi l'analphabétisme était-il en Flandre, en 1978, un phénomène insoupçonné et on pensait que chaque citoyen était naturellement capable de lire et d'écrire. Des situations observées dans l'armée belge (où l'apprentissage de la lecture et de l'écriture est organisé depuis les années 1950) ainsi que dans le secteur de l'aide sociale ont montré que pour de nombreux Flamands « pouvoir lire et écrire » n'était pas chose aussi évidente que se le représentait l'opinion publique. Résultat : un gigantesque tabou entourait cette lacune frappant les capacités d'un individu.

À partir de 1978, des initiatives d'alphabétisation sont nées dans toute la Flandre. La plupart du temps, ces initiatives étaient issues de structures d'aide et de formation déjà existantes qui pouvaient en assurer, au départ, l'appui matériel et logistique. C'étaient aussi des structures d'aide sociale, ce qui n'est guère étonnant, puisque c'est souvent dans ces organisations que la nécessité s'en est fait sentir pour la première fois. Au début, on s'efforçait dès lors clairement d'intégrer formation et assistance.

Les centres d'animation sociale (*centra voor maatschappelijk werk*), les centres de santé mentale (*centra voor geestelijke gezondheidszorg*) et autres ont donc été à la base du développement des différents centres d'alphabétisation. Cela étant, la plupart des centres ont acquis plus d'autonomie au cours des années, sans pour autant abandonner entièrement l'idée d'une intégration entre formation et assistance.

Les activités d'alphabétisation ont connu une très forte croissance en Flandre entre 1978 et 1988. Il existait en Flandre, en 1986, 46 programmes d'alphabétisation rassemblant 377 groupes de lecture et d'écriture avec un total près de 2 000 participants aux cours. L'association Alfabetisering Vlaanderen chapeautait ces différentes initiatives, les aidait et se chargeait de défendre leur intérêt. Le nombre de personnes employées dans ces mouvements a lui aussi augmenté très rapidement, de même que les subsides que leur octroyaient les pouvoirs publics flamands. Malgré cela, l'investissement des pouvoirs publics restait insuffisant et il fallut attendre un décret, en 1990, pour que l'aide accordée prenne quelque ampleur.

Parallèlement au développement des activités d'alphabétisation sont apparues, au début des années 1980, de nombreuses autres initiatives s'adressant aux personnes peu scolarisées. Ainsi, l'initiative « Opnieuw Gaan Leren » (« Réapprendre ») avait pour objectif de rafraîchir les connaissances de base engrangées à l'école. Il y eut également l'enseignement « de la deuxième chance » (*Tweedekansonderwijs*), qui s'adresse aux adultes qui veulent obtenir un diplôme de l'enseignement secondaire inférieur ou supérieur. La question de l'intégration des immigrés a donné naissance, au sein des associations qui s'y consacrent, à un large éventail de cours de langue. Vers la fin des années 1980 tout au moins, ces cours ont en outre pu bénéficier de fortes impulsions de la part des pouvoirs publics. Enfin, des fonds spéciaux d'aide aux groupes défavorisés ont également permis de mettre en place de nombreux programmes de formation pour personnes peu scolarisées.

Nous pouvons affirmer qu'à la fin de 1989, l'offre proposée aux adultes peu scolarisés se caractérisait par le saupoudrage et l'absence de coordination. De nombreux problèmes de correspondance entre programmes, de passerelles et d'orientation, un manque d'uniformité, etc., en ont résulté.

L'idée de mieux coordonner l'ensemble des initiatives qui s'adressent aux adultes peu scolarisés et de tendre à une offre intégrée et cohérente date d'avant 1990. Dès 1985, on a tracé les premières esquisses d'un concept qui allait ensuite servir de modèle aux centres d'éducation de base. Au début des années 1980, une *Platformoverleg Basiseducatie* (concertation / plate-forme sur l'éducation de base) voyait le jour : elle a donné naissance à cinq programmes autonomes, qu'on a appelés les « expériences d'éducation de base » (*Experimenten Basiseducatie*), en cinq lieux différents de Flandre. Ces expériences étaient encadrées et soutenues par le Vlaams Centrum voor Volksontwikkeling (VCVO : Centre flamand d'éducation populaire). Pendant cinq années, on a expérimenté les contenus, les méthodes, les structures de gestion et les accords de coopération. Mais ces cinq expériences n'ont pas le monopole de l'innovation et du développement des activités d'alphabétisation. D'autres initiatives, y compris l'Alfabetisering Vlaanderen, s'efforçaient sans cesse d'innover, surtout en ce qui concerne l'évolution méthodologique et le développement des compétences.

La phase d'expérimentation prit fin au début de 1990 et l'on s'attela à la confection d'un décret. Ce décret opte en définitive pour le modèle défini par les expériences du VCVO. L'analyse des lignes de force du décret en témoigne.

Un décret pour l'éducation de base

Le 28 juin 1990, le Vlaamse Raad a adopté le décret relatif à l'éducation de base. Ce décret règle trois aspects du secteur :

— L'organisation des activités locales qui ont lieu dans des centres d'éducation de base;

— La structure d'appui : le Centre flamand d'aide à l'éducation de base;

— L'installation d'un conseil consultatif, à savoir le Conseil de l'éducation de base.

Nous nous étendrons sur ces trois aspects, tout en nous abstenant toutefois d'en faire une description trop détaillée.

Les centres d'éducation de base

À l'heure actuelle, on compte 28 centres actifs en pays flamand. Chacun de ces centres a pour tâche d'organiser un ensemble cohérent d'activités éducatives s'adressant aux adultes peu scolarisés (c'est-à-dire aux personnes majeures qui n'ont pas de certificat homologué d'enseignement secondaire inférieur). Ces activités sont axées sur la connaissance des notions élémentaires de la langue néerlandaise et du calcul, sur l'élargissement des aptitudes sociales, l'orientation et l'intégration sociales. Les centres peuvent également mettre sur pied des activités de guidance et d'animation (qui devraient ou pourraient conduire les participants à un autre type d'activités, par la sensibilisation à des questions d'apprentissage et de formation). L'éducation de base s'est aussi professionnalisée, que ce soit dans ses tâches éducatives ou administratives. En ce qui a trait à l'emploi, la fourchette va du centre dont s'occupe une seule personne à des équipes de 33 éducateurs comme il en existe à Anvers.

Un centre peut être agréé s'il offre au moins 6 000 heures/participants (c'est-à-dire le nombre de participants multiplié par le nombre d'heures qu'ils ont suivies). Sur cette base, le centre reçoit un encadrement minimal (1 membre du personnel d'éducation et ½ membre du personnel administratif) ainsi qu'un budget. Le taux d'encadrement est augmenté par tranche de 4 000 heures.

Le décret règle donc l'aide financière. Mais on attend des communes pour lesquelles les centres travaillent qu'elles apportent également une contribution, notamment en s'occupant de leur hébergement. Par ailleurs, il existe évidemment d'autres possibilités de financement.

Chaque centre est une association sans but lucratif, dont les organes dirigeants sont composés de manière pluraliste. Dans l'assemblée générale comme dans le conseil d'administration, on trouve des représentants de différents secteurs : l'animation socioculturelle, l'enseignement de promotion sociale, la formation professionnelle du VDAB (Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling, l'Office flamand de l'emploi), la commune, le Centre public d'aide sociale (CPAS) et l'animation socio-éducative.

Le Centre flamand d'aide à l'éducation de base

Pour soutenir l'éducation de base dans la Communauté flamande, on a créé un centre d'aide. Ce centre est chargé de surveiller la planification des centres d'éducation de base, d'élaborer le matériel, de renforcer les qualifications du personnel d'éducation et des dirigeants, de veiller à la qualité de l'offre, de fournir de l'information et de s'occuper de la recherche. Ce centre est entièrement financé par le ministre de l'Enseignement et est, tout comme les centres locaux, un organisme privé sans but lucratif (OSBL) dont les organes dirigeants sont composés selon les règles qu'indique le décret.

Le Conseil de l'éducation de base

Le Conseil émet des avis à l'attention de l'Exécutif flamand sur l'agrément et le retrait de l'agrément des centres d'éducation de base. Il doit également donner son avis au sujet des développements souhaitables dans le secteur et sur les mesures préventives à prendre. Le Conseil se compose de représentants de différents secteurs qui sont désignés par les ministres de l'Enseignement, de l'Aide sociale et de la Famille, de la Culture et de l'Emploi. Il devrait surtout avoir des affinités avec le secteur de l'éducation de base.

Quelques observations

Bien que ce décret ait presque suscité l'enthousiasme et que de divers côtés les réactions aient été très positives, on a également signalé un certain nombre de points sombres. Nous en énumérerons quelques-uns sans cependant les approfondir.

— Peut-on encore alphabétiser dans les centres d'éducation de base? Des voix critiques décrivent l'éducation de base telle qu'elle est conçue actuellement comme quelque chose d'unilatéral. Dans cette optique, elles se demandent si dans ces centres, on peut encore effectivement s'occuper d'alphabétisation. L'alphabétisation est considérée en effet, dans ce cadre, comme une stratégie purement éducative alors qu'en soi, l'analphabétisme est un problème beaucoup plus complexe. En ramenant le problème à son seul aspect éducatif, on perd de vue que les retards éducatifs ne sont qu'un des problèmes que connaissent les groupes défavorisés.

— La mise en place d'un cadre légal permet la reconnaissance sociale de ce type d'activités. Cette reconnaissance sociale n'a cessé de croître ces dernières années, mais le décret l'a officialisée. Dorénavant, il est possible à l'éducation de base en tant que type particulier d'activité de mieux se légitimer par rapport à d'autres

organismes et à d'autres structures. Ce dernier point n'est évidemment pas sans rapport avec le fait que ces activités se voient décerner un label de «professionnalisme» et de «compétence», qui remplace l'ancienne étiquette de «volontariat».

— Le décret fait définitivement dépendre l'éducation de base en Flandre du ministre de l'Enseignement. Bien que ce choix soit délibéré — l'éducation de base en tant qu'élément de l'enseignement pour adultes — on peut considérer qu'il s'agit là d'un changement de cap sensible. En effet, toute la «préhistoire» de l'éducation de base se situe au sein du département de la Culture, dans le secteur de l'éducation populaire. On peut se demander si ce changement de cap n'entraînera pas des glissements importants en ce qui a trait aux objectifs (émancipation sociale), aux méthodes (prise en considération des particularités des participants) et à l'autonomie. L'éducation de base en tant que structure d'apprentissage s'oppose, dans cette optique, à l'alphabétisation en tant que stratégie de lutte contre les retards éducatifs.

— La transition qui a conduit des «précurseurs» aux centres d'éducation de base fut très rapide. En moins d'une demi-année, l'ensemble du secteur a dû se restructurer en profondeur : négocier, conclure des compromis, etc. Sur le plan local, on a pu très largement faire usage de ce qui existait déjà et, à très court terme, les maladies d'enfance qui vont de pair avec de tels changements ne manqueront pas de guérir. Sur le plan de la coordination, on est presque parti de zéro et on ne s'est guère efforcé d'intégrer ce qui existait déjà dans les nouveaux modes de fonctionnement. Parfois, il semble même qu'on veuille régler des comptes avec le passé. On peut se demander, en d'autres termes, si on pourra utiliser de manière efficace et digne les expériences accumulées au cours des années pour permettre le démarrage de ce type d'activité.

L'ÉDUCATION DE BASE ET LE RÉSEAU DES STRUCTURES SOCIALES

En tant que service s'adressant aux personnes peu scolarisées, le centre d'éducation de base se trouve placé dans un ensemble de services de formation et d'aide sociale. Cet ensemble pourrait se développer et devenir un réseau d'accords de coopération : la réalité semble indiquer que l'évolution va effectivement dans ce sens. Mais nous devons formuler ici une remarque importante. L'actuel décret sur l'éducation de base ne prévoit explicitement de coopération qu'au niveau administratif d'un organisme. Le décret tend certes implicitement à favoriser la coopération (au sens de mettre en œuvre, ensemble, des projets communs), mais il ne valorise pas vraiment ces projets (ils ne sont pas jugés subsidiables, sauf à des conditions

très strictes). L'aspect éducatif d'une situation qui fait problème doit toujours être isolé et se traduire dans un programme éducatif à durée déterminée organisé par le centre. Les exécutants sont toujours des éducateurs, attachés au centre ou recrutés à cet égard, et le programme doit s'insérer dans l'une des cinq pistes de l'éducation de base. D'autres formes de coopération (par exemple des formes d'éducation intégrées dans d'autres secteurs où il y a des problèmes) n'ont actuellement guère de chance d'aboutir.

Nous souhaitons examiner les possibilités actuelles de coopération sur la base d'un exemple réel. Je suis moi-même à l'heure actuelle membre du conseil d'administration qui est attaché au fonctionnement d'un centre d'éducation de base, celui de la région du Rupel-Vaartland-Klein-Brabant. À partir de cet exemple, je voudrais illustrer une série de possibilités de coopération, en ajoutant quelques exemples provenant d'autres centres et qui me paraissent compléter mon propos.

La coopération sur le plan administratif

Le décret prescrit avec précision comment doit être composé le conseil d'administration d'un centre d'éducation de base. Il ne s'est pas seulement inspiré de considérations idéologiques, mais aussi et surtout d'arguments de fond. Il considère, d'une part, que l'éducation de base doit être située dans le contexte de l'enseignement pour adultes et de l'éducation permanente, et constate, de l'autre, que l'éducation de base a des affinités et des liens manifestes avec les services d'aide sociale et qu'elle doit les conserver.

Concrètement, il s'agit dans le premier cas de l'animation socio-culturelle, de l'enseignement de promotion sociale, de la formation professionnelle (organisée par le Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding (VDAB) sous forme de formation des classes moyennes ou dans le secteur de l'agriculture). Dans l'autre cas, les partenaires sont le Centre public d'aide sociale (CPAS) et les initiatives locales d'animation socio-éducative. La commune est également associée. Les activités qui s'adressent aux immigrés ne sont pas mentionnées comme telles, peut-être parce que les localités peuvent présenter, sur ce point, de fortes différences.

Ce qui est décrit ci-dessous traite des formes de coopération prévues par le décret sur l'éducation de base. Nous chercherons, plus loin, à formuler quelques observations à ce sujet.

Tableau: Composition du conseil d'administration du centre d'éducation de base (région du Rupel-Flandre)[4]

Mandats	CEB	FI
Commune	3	39
CPAS	3	34
Animation socio-éducative	1	25
Anim. socioculturelle	7	164
Ens. prom. soc.	2	46
VDAB — form. prof.	2	33
Form. classes moyennes	0	5
Autres	0	34
Total	18	360

La coopération dans les faits

L'objectif du législateur était de créer, en instaurant une coopération structurelle, des possibilités de parvenir à des projets de coopération judicieux. Dans de nombreux cas, des contacts avaient déjà été noués dans le passé, mais de nouvelles portes se sont ouvertes dans de nombreux centres. Il est difficile de dire, après une première année, quel sera en définitive l'effet de ces contacts. Nous pouvons en tous cas constater un certain nombre de tendances positives. Nous en donnons ci-après quelques exemples.

• La coopération avec le VDAB

Dans le cadre de ses programmes de formation et de sa fonction de service de placement, le VDAB est régulièrement amené à aider des personnes peu qualifiées, et notamment des personnes dépourvues d'un certain nombre d'aptitudes de base.

À partir de là, il est possible de développer la coopération avec le centre d'éducation de base. Au sein du centre de la région du Rupel, on pense à une coopération dans le cadre:

1) de l'Action «Weerwerk», surtout pour la fonction d'orientation. En effet, l'une des missions des consultants de l'Action «Weerwerk» consiste à réintégrer les chômeurs de longue durée dans le monde du travail, éventuellement au moyen d'une formation appropriée;

2) de «projets charnières» (*schakelprojekten*); ces programmes s'adressent aux chômeurs peu scolarisés qui ont besoin d'être recyclés. Le VDAB organise lui-même ces cours, mais il se peut qu'il réserve trop peu d'attention aux aptitudes de base. Il peut y avoir là une tâche pour le centre d'éducation de base, au titre de la préparation à une formation «charnière»;

3) de «régions à impulser» (*impulsgebieden*); les pouvoirs publics octroient à certaines régions de Flandre, qui font face à des problèmes socio-économiques évidents, de l'aide financière pour réaliser certains projets. Un certain nombre de projets ont aussi une valeur éducative.

• La coopération avec le secteur de l'aide sociale et l'animation socio-éducative

La plupart des problèmes qui se posent à ceux qui s'adressent au secteur de l'aide sociale ont un aspect éducatif. Très souvent, les retards socio-économiques et les retards éducatifs vont de pair. De nombreux programmes mis sur pied dans ce secteur cherchent à aborder de manière intégrée plusieurs aspects de la problématique liée à ces retards. Toutefois, la législation prévoit indirectement qu'il y a lieu de maintenir certaines des cloisons (artificielles ou non) qui séparent les différentes stratégies susceptibles d'y porter remède.

1) La coopération avec les CPAS

Dans un certain nombre de cas, le CPAS fait dépendre l'octroi d'une aide financière d'une forme de mise au travail (ce qu'on appelle l'embauche sociale) permettant l'insertion des allocataires dans le monde du travail. Plusieurs de ces allocataires sont dépourvus d'aptitudes de base telles que la lecture, l'écriture et le calcul, et ce dans différents domaines (notamment l'emploi). La coopération avec un centre d'éducation de base peut, dans ce cas, représenter une aide utile.

2) La coopération avec l'animation socio-éducative

Dès lors que l'animation socio-éducative s'occupe d'aider les groupes défavorisés, elle doit aborder ce problème en tenant compte de ses différents aspects. Dans ce cas, ce sont des programmes de formation s'adressant à de jeunes chômeurs peu scolarisés et tendant à des résultats concrets (par exemple la construction d'un bateau). Ici aussi, formation professionnelle et éducation de base vont de pair. La formation générale et la formation sociale jouent un rôle important, de même que l'acquisition d'aptitudes de base et d'aptitudes sociales.

3) Dans le cadre de l'aide aux groupes défavorisés, les pouvoirs publics ont réservé un fonds à des projets concrets créés par des communes ou

des CPAS. L'éducation de base, ici aussi, pourra parfaire le volet éducatif si on opte pour des projets permettant de travailler effectivement avec des personnes défavorisées. La plupart de ces projets en sont encore à la phase de démarrage.

4) En outre, il existe un certain nombre d'accords de coopération qui concernent la réintégration de groupes particuliers, tels les anciens patients psychiatriques, les ex-détenus, les marginaux, etc. Ici aussi, la demande en matière d'aptitudes sociales et d'aptitudes de base est pressante.

5) Enfin, il y a encore la coopération avec les associations d'immigrés, qui connaît une ampleur croissante. Le plus souvent, ce sont les cours de néerlandais qui sont ici à l'avant-plan (cours qui sont d'ailleurs suivis par un nombre toujours plus élevé de personnes dans l'ensemble du secteur de l'éducation de base et qui pourraient, à terme, supplanter les autres types d'activité).

• La coopération avec l'enseignement de promotion sociale

La coopération avec l'enseignement de promotion sociale et l'enseignement « de la deuxième chance » en est encore à ses balbutiements. Cela s'explique surtout par l'absence de toute tradition dans ce domaine. Les contacts limités qui ont pu être établis jusqu'ici se situaient essentiellement dans le cadre de l'orientation, encore qu'il faille préciser que l'efficacité de cette politique d'orientation (bilatérale) peut être mise en doute. En outre, l'éducation de base devra se forger, en Flandre, une identité bien à elle dans le contexte de l'enseignement et accentuer ses particularités. En effet, le risque de voir l'éducation de base « avalée » par les structures complexes de l'enseignement, et donc marginalisée, existe bel et bien. Il faut encore explorer en profondeur les voies d'une coopération adéquate avec l'enseignement.

• La coopération avec l'animation socioculturelle

Ici aussi, la coopération en est à ses débuts — du moins dans la pratique quotidienne — car l'animation socioculturelle semble être un partenaire important, numériquement en tous cas.

J'ai l'impression que, jusqu'ici, cette prépondérance ne s'est pas véritablement traduite en initiatives de coopération concrètes. Les possibilités qui existent en ce sens se situeraient surtout dans le cadre de la guidance, c'est-à-dire de l'offre qui devrait ou pourrait conduire les participants à un type d'activités à franchir le seuil qui leur permettra de participer également à des activités d'un autre type, par une sensibilisation à des questions d'apprentissage et de formation.

L'orientation comme forme de coopération

La forme la plus évidente de coopération est celle de l'orientation. Selon la nature des besoins d'un individu, on peut faire appel à une diversité d'organismes et de services. Ce qui importe, c'est d'orienter l'individu qui a un problème déterminé vers le bon organisme, celui qui peut remédier à son problème. Sur ce point, il faudra que les centres d'éducation de base se fassent connaître et se familiarisent avec les autres possibilités existantes. D'autres services devront dès lors être sensibilisés, c'est-à-dire encouragés à être attentifs à d'éventuelles questions (sous-jacentes) d'apprentissage. Le centre d'éducation de base devra répondre à ce besoin en fournissant une information ciblée et en convenant d'une procédure d'orientation avec les nombreux services actifs dans le secteur de l'aide sociale.

Quelques exemples complémentaires de projets de coopération

Outre l'exemple des accords de coopération du centre d'éducation de base de la région du Rupel, nous souhaitons mentionner encore deux autres exemples, le premier en raison de son importance, le second à titre d'illustration.

• La coopération avec le mouvement quart monde

Les pauvres « de génération » constituent, dans la situation flamande, un groupe important de personnes défavorisées. Le concept des centres d'éducation de base et d'une offre éducative distincte ne peut apporter de solution à leurs difficultés. Mais il faut que l'on soit conscient, dans les centres, qu'ils doivent eux aussi être associés à la lutte contre les retards éducatifs et aux actions d'aide aux groupes défavorisés. Dans ce cadre, il faut imaginer des projets qui associent étroitement le mouvement quart monde, afin de mettre également une offre adéquate à la disposition de cette catégorie de personnes.

• Les projets destinés aux nomades

Un certain nombre de groupes de notre société n'ont pas de domicile fixe; il peut être difficile de leur proposer des services dans un lieu déterminé pendant une période plus ou moins longue. De nombreux projets d'apprentissage doivent nécessairement être conçus selon la situation particulière et les caractéristiques du groupe cible. C'est pourquoi les centres doivent faire preuve d'une certaine flexibilité afin de rechercher, sans désemparer, les approches appropriées à ces groupes.

LA PLACE DE L'ALPHABÉTISATION DANS CE RÉSEAU

En tout état de cause, nous considérons que l'alphabétisation est un des aspects de la politique d'aide aux groupes défavorisés. Les problèmes auxquels ces derniers ont à faire face sont complexes et les retards dont ils sont victimes prennent des formes multiples.

Bien que la formation soit souvent considérée comme un levier important pour remédier à ce problème, les obstacles qui empêchent les personnes de s'engager dans un processus de formation ou de participer à un cours sont généralement de nature autre qu'éducative. Très souvent, il s'agit de facteurs psychodynamiques (motivation), de problèmes matériels et financiers ou de problèmes psychosociaux (situation familiale). C'est précisément sur ces terrains que sont actifs la plupart des services du secteur de l'aide sociale. Pourtant, ils font souvent face, eux aussi, à des problèmes de nature éducative (par exemple, l'absence d'aptitudes de base). C'est là le point où aide sociale et éducation se touchent. C'est aussi un lieu où il est possible de mener une coopération plus intensive dans le cadre de l'aide aux groupes défavorisés.

La relation entre aide sociale et aide aux groupes défavorisés est nécessairement une relation de réciprocité, en ce sens que les deux partenaires ont une responsabilité propre et peuvent marquer leurs propres accents. Selon De Riek[5], une bonne façon d'aider les gens doit avoir des effets émancipatifs, surtout si l'on veut les aider à long terme. Concrètement, cela signifie qu'un aidant ne peut pas se limiter à la demande d'aide concrète, qu'il doit aussi rechercher les causes qui l'ont suscitée. Au cours de cette recherche, on peut tomber sur des problèmes d'apprentissage, latents ou manifestes. Il est important que les aidants puissent déceler ces problèmes, en parler avec la personne pour pouvoir ensuite l'orienter efficacement.

Toutefois, il peut aussi être utile d'élaborer ensemble un programme. On parle dans un tel cas de «formation intégrée». Il est essentiel, dans ce cadre, qu'un moment éducatif soit mis en corrélation avec la demande d'aide (en vue d'une solution à long terme), mais qu'il subsiste, pour l'individu, un lien avec la demande d'aide originale. On pourrait, de cette manière, mettre au point de nombreux projets adéquats avec les autres organismes d'assistance. L'aspect éducatif d'une situation qui fait problème pourrait être mieux abordé dans son contexte propre. L'éducation de base peut, à cet effet, fournir son expérience dans le domaine de la méthodologie et de la didactique, l'aide sociale créant les conditions qui permettront d'aboutir à une solution permanente et à un appui substantiel. Dans ce cadre, nous souhaitons indiquer encore une fois qu'il y a encore beaucoup à faire dans le domaine de l'accompagnement et de la motivation des participants potentiels aux activités d'éducation de base.

L'ALPHABÉTISATION DANS L'ÉDUCATION DE BASE: DES ATOUTS, MAIS AUSSI DES RISQUES

Nous voulons, parallèlement à la description qui vient d'être faite de la situation existante, formuler encore un certain nombre d'observations. En effet, le nouveau décret était très prometteur et on a attendu énormément de la mise en place des centres d'éducation de base. Mais il faut rester en éveil et avoir l'esprit critique. En dotant ce secteur d'un décret et en décrivant avec précision la façon dont il doit s'organiser, on met en branle un processus d'institutionnalisation dont nous savons que beaucoup d'organisations deviennent victimes. Des voix critiques se font régulièrement entendre dans le même sens à l'étranger, et notamment aux Pays-Bas. Là aussi, on a structuré il y a quelques années l'éducation de base et il sera important de comparer l'évolution de ce secteur en Flandre avec ce qui se passe aux Pays-Bas. Surtout pour éviter de commettre les mêmes erreurs.

Examinons successivement ces observations.

- Les structures mises en place garantissent l'intégration sociale du secteur (voir ci-dessus). Mais son intégration dans l'ensemble du réseau d'aide sociale ou dans le circuit d'enseignement devra se faire dans la pratique. Dans ce cadre, l'importance des compétences individuelles et des affinités des personnes en place avec ce type de travail sera primordiale. En effet, les structures de gestion ne sont pas toujours composées de travailleurs de terrain: on y retrouve d'abord des agents administratifs, ce qui ne garantit pas toujours une dynamique suffisante dans le développement de la programmation. Dans certains cas, il serait peut-être utile de séparer la gestion du centre de sa programmation (en installant une sorte de groupe de travail consultatif).

- La construction de centres d'éducation de base a permis de rassembler les forces et de mettre fin à l'éparpillement continuel de l'offre de formation pour adultes peu scolarisés. Mais on peut se demander si cette rationalisation n'a pas abouti à jeter l'enfant avec l'eau du bain. Est-on à même de récupérer l'expérience des praticiens «précurseurs»? Est-il toujours possible de favoriser à la base le développement des innovations et des compétences? Les prestations exigées du personnel éducatif sont considérables et pourraient y faire obstacle.

- La coopération avec d'autres secteurs sociaux est possible, mais n'est certainement pas encouragée ni valorisée. Les programmes de coopération sont porteurs d'innovation et peuvent avoir des effets dynamiques sur ce type d'activités. Mais ces programmes sont de grands consommateurs d'énergie et de temps. Si ces initiatives ne sont pas valorisées, nous

croyons qu'elles ne feront pas long feu. En effet, les esprits pragmatiques préféreront très vite consolider les services offerts (pour assurer leur survie), ce qui entraînera une perte de dynamisme.

- Le décret prévoit une approche très large du concept de «faible scolarisation», afin de donner un maximum de chances à un groupe cible qui rassemble, en Flandre, un grand nombre d'individus, et ce en dépit de la hausse du taux de scolarité. En raison même de cette approche très large, le risque existe de voir s'installer une démarche unilatéralement orientée en direction de groupes cibles qui sont faciles d'accès, avec des cours continuellement reproductibles. La population immigrée commence elle aussi à connaître les centres d'éducation de base et profite, avec raison du reste, des cours de néerlandais qu'ils offrent. On peut dès lors se demander si, en définitive, on ne va pas perdre de vue les analphabètes autochtones ou si ceux-ci vont encore trouver le chemin de l'offre éducative.

- L'intégration de l'éducation de base dans le système de l'enseignement amène à se poser la question de la spécificité de ce secteur et de sa place dans le cadre plus large de l'éducation des adultes. Il va falloir trouver des corrélations avec l'enseignement sans se retrouver absorbé par lui. Le danger d'une «scolarisation» est réel et on peut se demander s'il sera encore possible d'organiser des processus de formation axés sur les participants. De ce point de vue, l'éducation de base devra perpétuellement chercher à se légitimer et prouver l'autonomie de sa position. La pression des «territoires connexes» ne fera donc qu'augmenter: le secteur de l'emploi accentuera sa demande en personnel qualifié, l'enseignement tentera d'insérer l'éducation de base dans un curriculum, afin de favoriser au maximum le passage dans les circuits de la formation permanente. Le secteur de l'aide sociale continuera de mettre l'accent sur l'aide aux groupes défavorisés. L'éducation de base devra se trouver une place bien à elle dans cet écheveau et veiller à préserver sa spécificité.

- Enfin, il y a le projet social plus large, à savoir l'aide aux groupes défavorisés. L'éducation de base ajoute, dans ce cadre, une structure qui doit permettre de mieux aborder ce problème de façon pluriforme. Mais ce raisonnement recèle un grand danger. Le risque existe de voir l'analphabétisme ramené, dans le cadre de l'éducation de base, à un problème purement éducatif qu'il est possible d'éradiquer au moyen de cours et de programmes appropriés. Or, les rapports que l'analphabétisme a avec les retards socio-économiques ont été rappelés à plusieurs reprises dans le courant de l'Année internationale de l'alphabétisation. Pour le dire encore mieux: l'analphabétisme est l'un des aspects des problèmes que connaissent les groupes défavorisés. On peut donc défendre valablement l'idée d'une coopération intense avec le secteur de l'aide sociale, permettant de rechercher, dans un cadre coopératif, des stratégies et des solutions plurielles.

CONCLUSION

La question du rôle du mouvement associatif en Flandre se pose aujourd'hui différemment. On peut dire que les associations ont opté pour un système plus confortable, mieux subventionné et que leur travail s'inscrit entièrement dans le cadre des centres d'éducation de base.

Actuellement, les associations n'existent en fait que sur papier (enregistrées associations sans but lucratif — ASBL). Elles ont réellement intégré les centres. Il est bien possible que la prochaine étape consiste à les institutionnaliser officiellement.

Selon moi, l'éducation de base en Flandre a besoin au minimum d'un mouvement associatif qui approche l'analphabétisme dans son contexte global (social, politique et économique). On a besoin d'un mouvement qui se positionne en face du système de l'éducation et qui puisse exercer sa fonction critique.

Pour cela, il est nécessaire que le mouvement associatif appréhende l'illettrisme comme un problème culturel et politique. Cela suppose une réorganisation et une redéfinition des buts d'action, dans la mouvance des nouveaux mouvements sociaux par exemple.

Après la « préhistoire » de l'éducation de base, la lutte contre l'analphabétisme est entrée dans une nouvelle phase, avec des orientations fort différentes. L'histoire peut s'ouvrir après l'année zéro que fut l'Année internationale de l'alphabétisation.

NOTES

1. ADRIAENSENS, E., *et al.*, *Internationaal Jaar van de Alfabetisering: Witboekt*, Bruxelles, Stuurgroep IJA, 1991, 69 p.

2. Decret portant sur l'organisation de l'éducation de base pour adultes peu scolarisés, 28 juin 1990.

3. Pour ce chapitre nous nous inspirons de : GOFFINET, S.-A., et VAN DAMME, D., *Analphabétisme fonctionnel en Belgique*, Bruxelles et Hambourg, Fondation Roi Baudouin et Institut de l'Unesco pour l'Éducation, 1990, 221 p.

4. DE JONG, L., *et al.*, *Het eerste leer-jaar. Rapport over de ontwikkeling van de basiseducatie 1990-1991*, Malines, VOCB, 1991, 108 p. plus annexes.

5. DE RIEK, A., *Kansarmoede en alfabetisering*, Louvain, Lucas, 1991, 127 p.

L'ANALPHABÉTISME: QUEL SENS? QUELLES ACTIONS? QUELS RÉSULTATS?

Jean-Paul Hautecœur
Institut de l'Unesco pour l'Éducation
Hambourg, Allemagne

L'Année internationale de l'alphabétisation a cherché à renouveler la mobilisation dans la lutte contre l'analphabétisme dans le monde. Au Nord comme au Sud, même fléau, même combat, même s'il est d'intensité combien plus dramatique au Sud qu'au Nord.

Un même mot désignerait un même phénomène, même si au Nord on l'affuble d'un attribut à connotation technique : l'analphabétisme « fonctionnel » (les Français font usage d'un terme différent — l'illettrisme — qui ne s'est d'ailleurs pas introduit en Belgique ni au Québec). La différence entre le Nord et le Sud ne serait que de degré ou de position sur le « continuum » historique de la longue marche, de l'état primitif (ou d'enfance) de l'analphabétisme vers l'état développé (ou adulte) d'alphabétisme lettré et fonctionnel pour tous.

Le présent propos veut désimplifier la question de l'alphabétisation dans les pays industrialisés. Cette question est *multiple*, puisque l'on est devant des contextes fort différents selon les pays ; elle est *complexe*, puisque l'on est devant des faits sociaux et idéologiques conflictuels ; elle est *changeante*, mais nullement réductible au mouvement d'évolution ou d'involution linéaire sur un même tracé historique.

La question sera posée dans ses plus grandes généralités. Qu'entend-on par analphabétisme — fonctionnel ou dysfonctionnel — dans les pays industrialisés ? Quels types d'actions sont entrepris derrière ce qu'on nomme la « lutte contre l'illettrisme » ? Quels en sont les effets visibles, les résultats, moins en ce qui concerne l'apprentissage individuel que les changements sociaux importants ?

LES DISCOURS SUR L'ANALPHABÉTISME

Les acceptions du concept d'analphabétisme sont fort différentes selon les classes professionnelles, les « traditions » nationales, les lieux d'où on en parle. En voici une liste sommaire :

1. Analphabétisme : non-scolarisation ou sous-scolarisation

La fréquentation et la mobilité scolaires ainsi que la durée des études sont les facteurs qui déterminent la gravité et la fréquence de l'analphabétisme

dans une région ou un pays. La mesure est valable pour les adultes comme pour les jeunes. Le passage obligé par l'école a valeur de rite d'initiation. Variera seulement la difficulté de l'épreuve, qui va croissant : le seuil minimum a déjà été de quatre ou cinq années, ce qui équivaut au primaire; il tend aujourd'hui à être de neuf à douze ans, soit le niveau de fin d'études secondaires, et ce niveau lui aussi tend à la hausse.

En Amérique du Nord, il est encore courant d'assimiler analphabétisme complet à sous-scolarisation primaire, et analphabétisme fonctionnel à sous-scolarisation secondaire.

Ainsi, au Québec, le programme national d'alphabétisation des adultes vient se superposer au programme de formation de base des jeunes, pour conduire au même but : le diplôme d'études secondaires[1].

Au Portugal, où analphabétisme signifie encore souvent non-scolarisation, le programme d'alphabétisation des adultes vise minimalement le diplôme d'études primaires.

2. Illettrisme : compétence médiocre, insuffisante, en lecture

Avec la notion d'illettrisme les Français ont dédoublé le concept d'analphabétisme, jugé inadapté, sinon déplacé, après un siècle de scolarisation obligatoire. L'analphabétisme a été réservé à la population immigrante. Quant à l'illettrisme, attribué à la population nationale scolarisée, il a pris le sens que lui ont donné ses définisseurs officiels, inspirés par le discours de l'Association française pour la lecture (AFL) : celui d'une compétence pratique médiocre en lecture, mesurée surtout par la vitesse de lecture.

L'école n'a manifestement pas fait de tous ses élèves de bons lecteurs. La situation déplorée est que, si l'on compte un adulte sur dix qui ne fait pas usage de l'écrit (les non-lecteurs), parmi ceux qui en font usage il y en a environ un sur deux qui ne saurait pas le faire adéquatement. Ce sens technique donné par les Français à la notion d'illettrisme a aussi donné lieu à un concept substitut de l'alphabétisation : la « lecturisation[2] ».

3. Analphabétisme fonctionnel : usage inefficace de l'écrit dans des situations pratiques de vie quotidienne

Quelles sont les habiletés élémentaires jugées nécessaires pour pouvoir « fonctionner » dans la société nord-américaine d'aujourd'hui? Cet ensemble extensible de « basic skills » est une série de compétences pragmatiques pour résoudre les problèmes ordinaires de la vie quotidienne qui exigent un usage élémentaire de l'écrit dans la langue nationale, mais aussi une certaine familiarité avec le contexte culturel des problèmes posés, la

façon de les poser, etc. C'est une mesure d'adaptabilité à des situations considérées comme typiques de la vie nationale plutôt qu'une compétence linguistique abstraite ou appliquée à un contexte très circonscrit comme l'école ou un poste de travail.

Suivant ce critère de compétence minimale, on peut être scolarisé et parfaitement alphabétisé, même considéré comme lettré dans son contexte culturel d'origine, mais analphabète fonctionnel dans la société nord-américaine. Cette définition de l'analphabétisme embrasse un registre sociosémiotique beaucoup plus large que le registre linguistique ou même scolaire, comme on l'a vu. On estime entre un sur trois et un sur cinq le nombre d'adultes qui sont analphabètes fonctionnels au Canada et aux États-Unis[3].

4. Analphabétisme résiduel : déficience, handicap, inadaptation

Le vaste registre du pathologique est un terrain d'accueil favorable au concept d'analphabétisme, en particulier dans le milieu professionnel de la réadaptation scolaire, de la rééducation, de l'éducation compensatoire, etc. Si cette acception « clinique » de l'analphabétisme complet ou fonctionnel est particulièrement répandue en Europe du Nord ainsi qu'en Allemagne et en Autriche, on la retrouve en force un peu partout, surtout là où l'alphabétisation s'est développée comme une « éducation spécialisée » dans les programmes d'éducation des adultes. Elle est la réplique des filières « spéciales » de l'enseignement des jeunes où beaucoup d'éducateurs recyclés en alphabétisation des adultes ont été formés.

Dans cette acception, l'analphabétisme est un fait résiduel plutôt que massif, un ensemble de problèmes techniques individuels à traiter en milieu spécialisé. Ces problèmes repérés chez les adultes justifient qu'on mette la priorité du côté de la prévention, pour qu'on les décèle et qu'on les traite dès le plus jeune âge. D'où le développement qu'on observe de la « lutte contre l'illettrisme » dans certains milieux psychiatriques, du côté théorique et clinique de la psychologie cognitive, dans les secteurs préscolaires et périscolaires, etc.[4]

5. Analphabétisme : caractéristique de certaines minorités culturelles, nationales ou immigrantes

Alors que l'analphabétisme est généralement considéré comme un fait anormal dans la population autochtone, il peut être accepté comme un fait récurrent, majoritaire et « normal » chez certaines minorités linguistiques, dont la langue maternelle est surtout orale et considérée comme étrangère sur le territoire national. L'analphabétisme est ici un phénomène d'ethnocentrisme projeté sur les minorités culturelles qui forment le tiers monde local, « ghettoïsé », mal reçu dans les institutions nationales, non représenté dans leur personnel sauf domestique, ou encore mal intégré dans la société à cause des contradictions d'une situation de bilinguisme, etc.

C'est la situation des gitans en Europe, des Maghrébins en France, des Haïtiens au Québec, des francophones du Canada hors Québec, des Amérindiens, etc. La négation littérale de la différence est une source permanente de conflits interculturels, dont la solution prescrite est le plus souvent l'acculturation, l'assimilation : ce qu'on nomme l'intégration inévitable, sous peine d'exclusion.

La relégation linguistique de ces minorités dans une langue maternelle orale et « privée », symbole de leur analphabétisme dans la société d'écueils (on dit généralement avec bienveillance « société d'accueil »), peut conduire à différentes formes de refus de l'alphabétisation dans la langue dominante, comme à des velléités d'alphabétisation « de résistance » dans la langue maternelle, une forme renouvelée de revendications de droits, de services, de places autorisées[5]...

6. Analphabétisme : sous-qualification, déclassement dans tel ou tel milieu de travail

Le rapport entre compétence linguistique et marché de l'emploi est toujours mis en évidence en période de chômage structurel : c'est ce qui se passe dans la plupart des pays industrialisés depuis une dizaine d'années. La croissance des programmes de formation de base visant la réinsertion professionnelle correspond aux transformations technologiques qui touchent la plupart des secteurs industriels ainsi qu'aux nouvelles exigences en matière de qualification professionnelle[6].

Ce rapport direct entre la compétence, l'employabilité et la productivité n'est toutefois qu'un aspect de cette problématique majeure de la formation. On a souvent noté que la demande pour une main-d'œuvre non qualifiée (ou « qualifiée » péjorativement d'analphabète) était plus forte dans le secteur en croissance des services que la demande à des postes équivalents, pour une main-d'œuvre nationale plus scolarisée et plus exigeante sur le plan des salaires, des avantages sociaux, de la mobilité, etc.

Les programmes de formation de base, de remise à niveau, d'insertion et réinsertion professionnelle sont en fait devenus, dans beaucoup de pays, un passage obligé pour bénéficier d'allocations de chômage ou d'aide sociale, pour se qualifier non pas directement sur le marché de l'emploi, mais sur celui de l'employabilité, dans les agences de gestion du sous-emploi. L'alphabétisation : une nouvelle formule de gestion du temps et du personnel hors travail, ainsi la décrivent réalistement beaucoup de professionnels de l'alphabétisation.

7. Analphabétisme: versant culturel de la pauvreté, symbole d'une exclusion plus ou moins généralisée

L'association internationale ATD-Quart-Monde et bien d'autres également associent depuis longtemps analphabétisme à grande pauvreté. L'analphabétisme qualifie au négatif la sous-culture «en haillons» du quart monde, culture «patentée» avec les débris des autres par volonté de survie, sinon de résistance précaire à l'exclusion radicale.

Le quart monde s'est singulièrement agrandi dans les sociétés industrielles au cours des vingt dernières années: «nouveaux pauvres», jeunes et vieux exclus en plus grand nombre du réseau des échanges socio-économiques, exclus des communautés traditionnelles; immigrants sous-prolétarisés dans les centres urbains ou les banlieues ghettoïsées; enfants d'immigrés destinés à la délinquance comme expression d'une contre-socialisation dans les sociétés monoculturelles...

Dans un tel contexte, l'analphabétisme revêt une valeur plus symbolique qu'objective: il désigne plus une identité existant en dehors des échanges sociaux qu'une carence ou un handicap linguistique. Il symbolise la marginalité forcée, l'exclusion des réseaux d'échanges sociaux, culturels, économiques, politiques.

Les actions socioculturelles dans ces milieux sont polyvalentes et doivent être adaptées aux besoins prioritaires. L'apprentissage linguistique, les formations de base y sont souvent reléguées au second plan parce que la nécessité d'autres services s'impose. L'alphabétisation y prend un sens différent des actions d'éducation formelle: celui d'action culturelle visant l'expression d'une identité, la revendication et la reconnaissance de droits élémentaires, l'organisation de la survie. Dans le lexique des services publics, on parle alors d'«insertion sociale[7]».

8. Analphabétisme secondaire: effet généralisé de la culture de masses sur la «majorité silencieuse»

Cette dernière acception, dans une liste qui est loin d'être complète, peut être vue comme un abus sémantique. On peut pourtant la prendre au sérieux. Elle suppose une analyse attentive du marché des productions culturelles, des infrastructures de communication, des politiques publiques et privées de production et de diffusion, des modes de consommation privés de ces messages, etc. Elle désigne la masse de récepteurs du même téléroman à la même heure sur un même territoire, stimulés par le tabac, l'alcool et la publicité d'objets sublimés... Elle désigne une alphabétisation mécanique, obéissante, disponible à la réception, absente à l'émission, non sélective, non critique. Elle concerne aussi l'école universelle aux programmes stéréotypés, aux environnements dégradés, aux personnels déclassés

et déprimés, aux conflits étouffés ou calfeutrés, dont la population de jeunes compte aussi parmi les plus avides consommateurs de télévision...

Depuis longtemps, l'image explicite de ce modèle d'«alphabétisation éteinte» est surtout projetée sur l'Europe communiste d'hier. En ce qui concerne l'Ouest, seule une minorité d'intellectuels la décrivent et la décodent. Ces analyses sont-elles seulement à mettre au compte d'une conception de l'alphabétisation secondaire confinée dans quelques chapelles comme pouvait l'être jadis la culture lettrée? La question mérite qu'on s'y arrête[8]...

Il est donc difficile de parler d'analphabétisme au singulier. Réduire l'analphabétisme à un phénomène universel relève du mythe ou de la stratégie militante. Le mettre en évidence à l'aide de chiffres démonstratifs relève par ailleurs de la démagogie politique ou de la désinformation journalistique.

Le discours sur l'analphabétisme est avant tout socialement situé: un ensemble de faits idéologiques. L'important est plus de savoir qui définit ce discours que qui il désigne. Et pourquoi tel groupe l'a-t-il développé? À quoi ce discours sert-il et à qui le sert-on?

L'intérêt de la piste esquissée a été de montrer que les définitions sociales ou leurs usages sont multiples, qu'ils peuvent être contradictoires et antagonistes. Une autre étude pourrait analyser la façon dont les groupes et leurs discours différents convergent à certaines occasions, se rassemblent pour ne plus former qu'une litanie consensuelle à l'occasion d'une célébration, par exemple, l'Année internationale de l'alphabétisation[9]...

Ce que beaucoup de ces discours ont en commun, c'est leur fonction coercitive de persuasion. Persuasion des lettrés quant à la gravité du problème et à la nécessité d'agir; persuasion surtout des «autres» à qui le problème est attribué et dans lequel ils doivent se reconnaître. Telle est la principale fonction de l'entreprise idéologique d'alphabétisation: convaincre l'autre qu'il est bien tel qu'on le désigne, puis transformer la cible de victime en bénéficiaire.

Pour comprendre ce récent phénomène de l'analphabétisme dans le discours professionnel, journalistique et politique des pays industrialisés, il est utile de changer de camp. Il faut aller voir de l'autre côté quelles perceptions on a du «problème», si l'on en parle, dans quels termes[10]. Alors les écarts en matière de pratiques culturelles, de représentations et de valeurs sont beaucoup plus grands qu'entre un groupe de «lettrés» et un autre. L'attribut d'analphabète y est récusé. Les outils, les modes de communication dans les réseaux usuels sont efficaces. On sait généralement comment faire pour s'en sortir dans une communication écrite. Et le désir est rarement de bénéficier d'un service de formation, ce que disait

clairement un professionnel de l'alphabétisation qui connaissait bien son public : « La majorité des analphabètes ne fait pas grand cas de nos dispositifs... Pour le dire crûment, les « analphabètes » ne veulent pas être alphabétisés. Ce n'est pas leur projet, c'est le nôtre[11]. »

Finalement, dans ce jeu complexe mais inégal d'interactions plurielles et antagonistes, les analphabètes ne seraient plus que la petite minorité de ceux qui se reconnaissent comme tels, selon la définition des autres. Ceux qui ont trouvé dans l'identité négative intériorisée une raison d'être. Il y en a. Ils forment le public volontaire de l'alphabétisation. Ils témoignent devant les journalistes. Ils servent avant tout à convaincre les autres. Ils sont on ne peut plus précieux pour faire la preuve de la nécessité et des bienfaits de l'alphabétisation[12].

LES ACTIONS ENTREPRISES DANS LA « LUTTE CONTRE L'ILLETTRISME »

Globalement, on peut dire que le terrain d'activités est en croissance : depuis une vingtaine d'années aux États-Unis et depuis une dizaine d'années dans la plupart des pays d'Europe.

Le pouvoir de *mobilisation* des campagnes de lutte contre l'analphabétisme est remarquable. Des réseaux entiers d'associations s'y engagent. En Amérique du Nord, en Grande-Bretagne, en Irlande, en Belgique, en France, elles occupent encore la plus grande part du terrain de l'alphabétisation, sous forme bénévole ou subventionnée. À côté d'anciennes organisations qui ont pour mission unique l'alphabétisation, de nouveaux « lobbies » puissants sont apparus, dont on peut douter qu'ils soient désintéressés : par exemple, les bibliothèques, l'industrie du livre et du papier, la presse, des organisations de gens d'affaires, des mouvements humanistes, nationalistes, culturels qui agissent dans le domaine de l'éducation, des syndicats. Ces groupements agissent directement en offrant des services à la population ; l'essentiel de leurs actions porte sur l'information, la mobilisation, la conscientisation, la pression sur les pouvoirs publics, le soutien aux organismes de première ligne.

Beaucoup d'États ont reconnu comme une *priorité nationale* le développement des actions d'alphabétisation. Ils y investissent une part toujours plus grande des ressources et des services publics. Les engagements varient suivant les pays :

— Législation créant un secteur spécial d'alphabétisation ou d'éducation de base en éducation des adultes (cas des Pays-Bas, du Portugal, de l'Allemagne, du Québec par exemple)[13] ;

— Subventions aux gouvernements régionaux ou à des organisations non gouvernementales, appuyées par des campagnes publiques

d'information, de mobilisation, de recrutement (cas des États-Unis, du Canada, de la Grande-Bretagne)[14];

— Programmes de formation, variables suivant les conjonctures économiques et sociales, suivant les programmes politiques des partis au pouvoir; ces programmes sont administrés généralement par des organisations non gouvernementales contractuelles (cas de la France et de la Communauté française de Belgique notamment)[15];

— Renforcement des actions de prévention dans le secteur de l'éducation spéciale ou compensatoire, à l'école et dans les communautés, à l'âge préscolaire, en alternance avec des stages de travail, etc. (cas de la Suède et du Danemark, et aussi, à un degré variable, de divers autres pays)[16].

La conséquence, ou le corollaire, de ce développement dans la société civile et au sein des pouvoirs publics, c'est évidemment la *forte croissance du secteur de la formation*. On assiste à la professionnalisation d'une activité qui, à l'origine, était essentiellement bénévole et militante, donc à la structuration de ses corps d'emploi, de son savoir, de la formation de ses formateurs, etc. Le secteur universitaire et privé de la recherche est en expansion: il suffit de recenser, par exemple, le nombre des thèses consacrées au sujet ou de noter la croissance des références bibliographiques.

Deux mouvements contraires sont observables: d'un côté l'éclatement du champ, l'ouverture du marché et l'investissement interdisciplinaire du fait entre autres de la pluralité des actions; de l'autre sa fermeture, sa réglementation professionnelle, son incorporation dans le secteur fort balisé de l'éducation. Dans certains pays, on a clairement opté pour l'une ou l'autre tendance; dans d'autres, les deux coexistent en concurrence.

Croissance des actions, *croissance des publics touchés*, mais aussi élargissement des marges où on les recrute. L'alphabétisation, les formations de base, de mise à niveau, d'insertion sociale et professionnelle touchent maintenant des «clientèles» de tous âges, de divers statuts socio-professionnels, travailleurs ou sans-emploi, personnes vivant en établissement (psychiatrique, carcéral, d'accueil, etc.), handicapés, homophones et allophones, personnes ayant une éducation primaire et même postsecondaire. (Au Québec, par exemple, une revue d'alphabétisation, intitulée *Literacy across the Curriculum* est publiée dans un collège pour un public d'élèves préuniversitaires.)

L'image est celle d'un champ professionnel qui bénéficie d'une conjoncture particulièrement bonne et d'une croissance continue depuis les débuts. On pourrait s'attendre que les budgets qui y sont consacrés reflètent la même croissance. C'est loin d'être le cas partout. La tendance est

plutôt à la baisse des budgets dans les formations de base, budgets recyclés dans les formations manifestement plus « efficaces », plus tournées vers le marché de l'emploi. Même là où l'on a institutionnalisé la formation de base, la professionnalisation de l'emploi a généralisé le recours aux *emplois précaires* plutôt qu'égalisé les conditions de travail des éducateurs des classes ordinaires et de l'éducation permanente. À quelques exceptions près (les Pays-Bas ?), le terrain de l'alphabétisation n'a pas connu, malgré sa croissance, une revalorisation du statut de ses professionnels. Dans beaucoup de pays, la plus grande partie des activités de base est encore dévolue au secteur associatif, totalement ou en partie bénévole. Et là où il a pu se constituer en secteur de formation privé, ses priorités suivent celles de la demande du marché de l'emploi et des politiques nationales qui conduisent à la formation sélective, technique et donc à l'abandon des actions socioculturelles, jugées comme étant menées en pure perte.

S'il fallait esquisser une typologie des principales approches d'alphabétisation en Europe et en Amérique du Nord, on pourrait énumérer les quelques tendances suivantes :

— L'approche traditionnelle anglo-saxonne de *l'aide individuelle* donnée par des bénévoles, dans le cadre d'une organisation locale ou dans celui, très structuré, d'une organisation nationale ou internationale. Cette approche peut être indépendante ou intégrée à l'éducation permanente de l'enseignement public ;

— *L'approche scolaire*, qui calque ses objectifs d'apprentissage sur ceux de l'école, qui tend à « harmoniser » son organisation avec celle du secteur des jeunes de l'enseignement public. Si l'éducation des adultes se différencie surtout par son discours et ses pratiques « andragogiques », structurellement elle est gérée comme un secteur du système d'éducation et elle obéit à ses principales normes et directives (cas du Québec) ;

— L'approche *ABE* (« Adult Basic Education »), un modèle pragmatique d'éducation de base, relativement autonome par rapport au système scolaire des jeunes, pouvant regrouper l'ensemble des formations de base pour adultes de nature scolaire, civique, professionnelle, pratique, physique, etc. Dans ce cadre mou (qui peut devenir un programme national, comme aux Pays-Bas), le concept linguistique et culturel d'alphabétisme (« literacy ») est inclus dans le concept polyvalent d'habiletés de base (« basic skills ») ;

— L'approche « *insertion / réinsection socioprofessionnelle* » définie par ses objectifs plus que par un cadre administratif ou des contenus d'apprentissage, objectifs dont l'essentiel est l'accès à l'emploi. C'est une approche polyvalente de la formation, qui

peut être gérée par différents secteurs de l'Administration publique (social, économie, main-d'œuvre, etc.) plutôt que par le seul système d'enseignement, et qui a donné lieu, en France particulièrement, à une expansion formidable du secteur associatif et privé de la formation ;

— L'approche *éducation populaire / action communautaire*, ou socio-culturelle, aussi nommée approche holistique, de développement intégré et, dans sa version plus politique, de conscientisation : elle désigne des actions diverses, sur une base locale, menées par des associations qui définissent leurs objectifs avec les gens intéressés. L'alphabétisation est une intervention dans le registre linguistique et culturel, intimement liée à l'histoire personnelle et sociale du groupe, du quartier. Elle a pour but de lire cette histoire, de la dire, pour l'améliorer ou la changer ;

— L'approche *culturelle / interculturelle* consiste à agir afin de modifier le contexte matériel, organisationnel et imaginaire d'une localité, d'une région, d'un groupe social plutôt que l'éducation directe des individus : par des créations, des productions culturelles, l'amélioration des réseaux de communication, la création de bibliothèques, des revendications ou du « lobbying » politique, la création et le renforcement d'industries culturelles, etc. En milieu culturel et linguistique différencié, ces actions peuvent consister à créer un environnement interculturel ou à revendiquer le droit et les moyens de le réaliser.

Le nouveau contexte multiethnique dans les milieux urbains des pays industrialisés exige, parfois d'urgence, que le concept et les pratiques d'alphabétisation se pluralisent, ce qui peut impliquer des changements radicaux dans les traditions culturelles nationales ;

— L'approche *préventive, ou périscolaire, ou intergénérationnelle* : elle est significative d'une tendance internationale à étendre l'alphabétisation au-delà du cadre de la formation plus ou moins scolaire pour la replacer dans l'espace social, en particulier là où les enfants apprennent — ou devraient apprendre — à parler, à lire, à communiquer, à utiliser des livres, des outils et des sources d'information, etc. Elle s'organise à la périphérie de l'école (école des parents, école de devoirs) mais aussi de plus en plus loin : bibliothèques de rue, actions dans les crèches de milieu défavorisé, actions communautaires de nature écologique ou historique mettant à contribution des jeunes et vieux, etc. ;

— Il y a encore tout ce secteur des *éducations spécialisées*, par exemple pour personnes handicapées auditives, visuelles, cognitives,

psychiatrisées, etc. Dans certains pays, il est intégré aux programmes largement ouverts de l'alphabétisation. Il peut même en constituer le vecteur dominant, ce qui contribue à médicaliser ou à donner un sens surtout «clinique» à l'alphabétisation, nouveau champ d'action des psychothérapeutes.

En conclusion, ce domaine diversifié d'activités qu'est devenue l'alphabétisation est encore largement expérimental. Les départements d'universités, les centres de recherche qui s'y intéressent ou s'y consacrent entièrement se multiplient et se diversifient. Néanmoins, la valeur symbolique et économique de la profession n'a pas, à l'expérience, acquis de plus-value.

Il s'est plutôt banalisé. Il a perdu de son pouvoir d'attraction et de mobilisation. Politiquement, le thème de l'analphabétisme attire maintenant plus les groupements conservateurs que les groupements gauchistes. Il aide à la mobilisation dans la résistance à l'érosion des valeurs, du patrimoine, de la langue maternelle plus que dans la lutte contre la pauvreté ou dans les revendications interculturelles. Il ne débouche plus, ou si peu, dans les actions internationales de développement. Comme on dit de plus en plus avec cynisme dans les milieux de l'alphabétisation, «l'alpha» institutionnalisée consiste surtout «à mieux intégrer à la marginalité», à contrôler à peu de frais l'exclusion dangereuse[17].

QUELS RÉSULTATS?

La question est évidemment à multiplier. Chaque type de programme a ses propres objectifs qui justifient qu'on les évalue séparément. Mais aussi, une évaluation, même globale, des résultats des actions d'alphabétisation suppose que soit précisé le lieu d'où on la fait: planificateurs et décideurs des services publics, personnel politique, professionnels de la formation, mouvements associatifs, publics cibles, victimes ou bénéficiaires des services, suivant l'analyse qu'on fait.

La question implique aussi qu'on interroge les autres fonctions ou finalités sociales des actions d'alphabétisation, qui prennent un sens majeur si l'on en connaît l'histoire et le contexte d'émergence. Schématiquement, et non sans nuance provocatrice, on peut affirmer que les résultats de l'alphabétisation mesurés à ses principaux objectifs théoriques sont, *sinon nuls, carrément médiocres*. Officiellement, les alphabétiseurs et leurs organisations présentent des résultats «présentables». À l'observation méthodique et à l'autocritique «postopérationnelle», on obtient cependant des témoignages du type:

> «Malgré toutes nos stratégies pédagogiques et nos efforts, l'alphabétisation demeure pénible et peu

> porteuse de réussite. Aucun jeune n'a quitté la Boîte à lettres en sachant lire et écrire convenablement[18]. »
>
> « Sans doute il faut reconnaître certains résultats des actions d'alphabétisation. Mais il faut dévoiler qu'ils sont minces et qu'ils ne rencontrent pas le fond du problème[19]. »

Du côté des apprenants, malgré les appréciations positives, même enthousiastes, et l'ambiance chaleureuse observée dans beaucoup de milieux d'alphabétisation, il faut reconnaître que *les attentes profondes sont fort différentes des buts visés* par les services. Elles ne s'expriment pas en termes éducatifs, linguistiques ou d'insertion, mais d'échange, de communication, de rapports humanisés, ou encore de droits sociaux : travail, logement, etc. La demande linguistique n'est le plus souvent qu'un alibi, une tactique pour se placer dans le même « canal » que les pourvoyeurs de services qui peuvent être utiles sur d'autres plans, ou encore, le simple miroir de l'offre, qui a la légitimité du savoir, le pouvoir de définition. Alors le service formellement « enseignant », thérapeutique, de nature « professionnelle » risque *d'écarter le plus grand nombre*, un fait généralisé et reconnu par beaucoup d'organisations.

Il y a une incompatibilité radicale entre l'offre et la demande d'alphabétisation, la seconde n'étant qu'une prescription de l'offre, qui a pour principal effet d'occulter la réalité de la demande. La demande d'alphabétisation, du côté des dépossédés de cette qualité précieuse, difficile à appréhender positivement, n'a pas d'histoire ! De toutes pièces elle a été construite par les autres qui ne se reconnaissent pas dans les vocables d'alphabétisés, de lettrés, d'inclus ou d'insérés, mais dans ceux de travailleurs sociaux, d'éducateurs, de formateurs. Ces identités socioprofessionnelles ont été bâties sur une négation. Quand, pourquoi et comment ? Répondre à cela serait l'objet d'une autre étude passionnante[20].

L'un des résultats les plus manifestes des campagnes et des services d'alphabétisation a donc été la *création d'une nouvelle classe de citoyens*, déclarés incompétents, mals dans leur peau, etc., mais récupérables, éducables, recyclables. Les sociologues, les statisticiens, les journalistes ont prouvé et mesuré son existence. Leurs estimations sont à la hausse[21].

Nouvelle classe ou nouvelle appellation des pauvres et des exclus ? Une classe suppose un classement. Et il n'est pas indifférent que celui-ci s'exprime dans le registre culturel plutôt qu'économique. Il n'y pas d'autre solution immédiate au déclassement socioprofessionnel, à la perte d'emploi temporaire puis de longue durée que le traitement éducatif, culturel, idéologique. Sa fonction : faire assumer par la victime sa disgrâce personnelle due à sa propre incompétence ; la persuader que sa disqualification n'est pas une fatalité et que la solution est à sa portée ; l'insérer dans un réseau de services et d'aide qui sont en vases communicants avec d'autres réseaux, en attendant une issue temporaire ; bref, *occuper positivement les exclus pour calfeutrer et neutraliser la révolte.*

La stratégie et ancienne. Les campagnes d'alphabétisation se sont imposées, là où il était devenu nécessaire de gérer plus efficacement les grands nombres, par la persuasion plutôt que par la force. Cela se fait par l'unification linguistique, une offensive de grande envergure de nature technique, technologique, idéologique, politique[22]. Si l'on comprend dans ce sens sociologique l'entreprise d'alphabétisation, on comprendra aussi qu'elle doit être unitaire : parler d'alphabétisations, au pluriel, dans un même temps et dans un même espace social (national) est une provocation ! D'où la disgrâce des idées/actions interculturelles quand elles revendiquent la différence et le pluriel là où les stratégies de gestion sont unitaires[23].

Plus d'un observateur s'étonne de la nécessité de telles campagnes d'alphabétisation dans les pays industrialisés. La planification linguistique est depuis longtemps maîtrisée, à part quelques «conflits régionaux» (Canada et Belgique, par exemple). Et la scolarisation universelle est établie depuis longtemps. Restent quelques isolats mal intégrés, des minorités culturelles en voie de sédentarisation. Alors pourquoi tant d'analphabètes (entre 10 et 40 p. 100 des populations nationales adultes) et d'illettrés ?

Et pourquoi une telle mobilisation pour ces nouvelles campagnes d'alphabétisation ? Parce qu'elles ont le pouvoir de susciter un consensus — l'éducation, l'action culturelle ont remplacé l'Église dans cette fonction — ainsi qu'un énorme potentiel d'efficacité. Et la fabrication de ces nouveaux analphabètes ? On a vu que les arguments ne manquent pas : hausse des critères de qualification, compétences déclarées insuffisantes, mise en cause de l'école, de la culture de masse, difficultés et handicaps personnels, etc. Face aux crises sociales profondes qui touchent aujourd'hui tous les pays industrialisés, l'ancienne stratégie de la mobilisation culturelle et morale a été réactualisée. Le placebo serait efficace.

Les résultats doivent être cherchés moins sur le plan de l'alphabétisation en tant que telle que dans *l'effet idéologique des campagnes d'alphabétisation*. Même danger, même combat. L'alphabétisation se résume en grande partie à ce consensus généreux et vertueux. C'est là sa plus grande utilité[24].

L'autre résultat conséquent, déjà signalé, est la *croissance remarquable du secteur professionnel des formations de base*. Elle a été particulièrement bienvenue dans les pays où les budgets et les emplois en éducation étaient à la baisse. Elle a été salutaire pour une bonne partie du mouvement associatif, qui est passé du bénévolat à la sous-traitance et même parfois à l'entreprise privée. Elle a été une voie de recyclage prolongée, sinon permanente, pour beaucoup de travailleurs du social, du socioculturel et du sociopolitique démobilisés à l'époque de gloire du libéralisme.

Croissance, mais aussi *recherche, expérimentation* d'actions locales, d'organisations plus efficaces par transformation des objectifs des

institutions en objectifs redéfinis localement et réappropriés par des réseaux plus organiques de communication et de solidarité. Le champ de l'alphabétisation est aussi un terrain fertile en *expériences de démocratie participative*, locale, multiculturelle. Les professionnels de l'alphabétisation sont restés, on l'a vu, une classe au statut précaire, marginale et hétéroclite à côté des corps constitués du social, de l'éducation, de la culture. Et si les services mis en place tendent parfois à l'institutionnalisation avec pour conséquence une réglementation plus serrée des «cahiers des charges», les espaces d'indétermination demeurent assez grands pour louvoyer entre la prescription technique et l'aventure anthropologique: dans le jeu de la langue, des langues[25].

Le tableau, du côté des organismes d'alphabétisation, a néanmoins des zones sombres. Ont bénéficié de la croissance ceux qui se sont inscrits dans le sillon des politiques et des programmes nationaux, en particulier dans le secteur des formations liées à l'éducation et à l'emploi. À contre-courant, *les organismes d'éducation populaire*, d'action communautaire autocentrée, d'action socioculturelle offensive *ont été marginalisés*. Dans certains pays où un programme de formation de base accapare toutes les ressources publiques, ces organismes n'ont pas eu d'autre choix que l'intégration ou le sabordage à plus ou moins court terme[26].

Doit-on considérer comme un résultat négatif le fait, généralisé, que le public visé ne se présente pas, ou qu'il déserte quand on l'a recruté de peine et de misère? Certainement, quand le constat d'échec donne lieu à des *campagnes renforcées du recrutement*, à des *mesures d'inscription coercitives*, à la présence obligatoire (comme à l'école, au service militaire, ou même aux offices religieux), à des mesures punitives comme la diminution ou même la suppression de l'aide sociale en cas d'absence ou de «désertion». Quand des programmes ont été mis sur pied, des ressources publiques investies, et quand il y a consensus sur la nécessité d'être alphabétisé, ne pas répondre à l'appel risque de devenir un délit[27].

L'analphabétisme n'est pas un état neutre, ni stable. S'il n'est pas traité — on prétend que la solution est simple, à la portée de tous — on risque la délinquance. Aux États-Unis, il est courant de décrire les analphabètes comme une «population à risque» (titre d'un rapport présenté au président Reagan: «A Nation at Risk»). L'analogie historique s'impose: «Classes laborieuses, classes dangereuses», disait-on il y a plus d'un siècle en Europe. De même au Canada il est courant de lire que les populations à plus haut taux d'analphabétisme sont les détenus, ce qui donne à croire que l'analphabétisme est criminogène.

Pour conclure sur une note moins grinçante, il faut aussi reconnaître que l'alphabétisation de domestication, pour employer l'expression de Paulo Freire, a engendré son antithèse (ou ses parasites pour être moins dualiste, c'est-à-dire encore moniste): *l'expérimentation culturelle sur le*

terrain fertile du langage. À côté du marché des formations, il y a des ateliers d'écriture, des créations de journaux de quartier, des productions et des publications locales concernant l'histoire locale, des concours de poésie, des correspondances et des échanges internationaux, des radios communautaires « libres » où la parole illégitime peut devenir message public, des aventures d'écriture collective mises au théâtre pour recréer l'équivalent des mystères du Moyen-Âge. La culture populaire a pu gagner un peu d'espace de création, d'expansion et de légitimité là où étaient programmées des séances de rééducation. Les cultures étrangères aussi ont pu gagner un peu d'espace, sans masque folklorique ni laissez-passer[28].

Moins visible, moins spectaculaire, mais non moins actif a été le travail d'organisation, de coordination, de liaison, de représentation, de revendication du mouvement associatif pour gagner de l'autonomie, de la représentativité et de l'efficacité. Les *changements « politiques »* opérés sur les plans local et régional et auprès des populations « passives » dans le rapport aux pouvoirs publics sont sûrement profonds[29]. Où, comment et jusqu'à quel point le déploiement de campagnes d'alphabétisation nationales a-t-il aidé à la transformation des rapports de communication par le développement des réseaux « alternatifs » ? Dans quelle mesure l'alphabétisation de salut public a-t-elle aussi engendré, grâce à la réappropriation de quelques moyens et de positions de communication par les victimes désignées, son antidote, l'alphabétisation de résistance[30] ? La question est des plus intéressantes à explorer.

NOTES

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2. V. Espérandieu, A. Lion, J.P. Bénichou, *Des illettrés en France*, Paris, La documentation française, 1984; Jean-Pierre Vélis, *La France illettrée*, Paris, Seuil, 1988.

3. Voir par exemple Jonathan Kozol, *Illiterate America*, New York, Anchor Press / Doubleday, 1985.

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6. T. Sticht, L. Mikulecky, *Job-Related Basic Skills. Cases and Conclusions*, Colombus, Ohio State University, National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1984.

7. M. Fox, C. Baker, « L'analphabétisme aux États-Unis: discours, recettes et réalité », *ALPHA 90*.

8. H.M. Enzenberger, « In Praise of the Illiterate », *Adult Education and Development*, 8, mars 1987; aussi l'œuvre de Richard Hoggart.

9. Jean-Paul Hautecœur, « L'analphabétisation des pays industrialisés: du mythe à la reconstruction des faits », inédit.

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FAIRE TOMBER LES BARRIÈRES: UNE ACTION LOCALE EN ÉDUCATION DE BASE*

Blair Denwette
Lyn Tett
Maria Walker
WABET, Dundee
Grande-Bretagne

* Texte traduit de l'anglais

HISTORIQUE DU PROJET

Depuis une dizaine d'années, les nombreux problèmes associés à la vie en milieu urbain retiennent de plus en plus l'attention des Britanniques. Le déclin des villes et les façons d'y remédier sont au cœur des préoccupations. En 1988, le gouvernement britannique a déposé un livre blanc intitulé *New Life for Urban Scotland*, dans lequel il aborde ces problèmes épineux et les moyens à mettre en œuvre pour y remédier, en exposant dix symptômes propres aux milieux défavorisés. La scène du projet d'alphabétisation, Whitfield, présente tous ces symptômes et constitue l'exemple type du milieu défavorisé sur plusieurs plans que décrit le livre blanc.

Whitfield est une vaste cité ouvrière située au nord de la ville de Dundee, sur la côte est de l'Écosse. Elle compte presque exclusivement des logements appartenant au Conseil de district de Dundee. Une multitude de problèmes graves y sont apparus au cours des dernières années, et ce pour plusieurs raisons: logements très pauvres (c'est particulièrement le cas des maisons en rangée de la zone de Skarne), population migrante en grande partie, emplois rares sur place, taux de chômage le plus élevé de Dundee et proportion élevée d'assistés sociaux. La population ne cesse de diminuer, et le nombre de maisons vacantes augmente de manière alarmante. La cité dans son ensemble projette en fait une bien piètre image.

Whitfield ne compte pas d'entreprises commerciales ou industrielles importantes qui soient génératrices d'emplois. Le taux de chômage chez les hommes s'élève à 40 p. 100, ce qui représente plus de deux fois celui du reste de la ville. Une personne sur six est en chômage depuis plus de cinq ans, et celles qui travaillent ne reçoivent, pour la plupart, qu'un faible salaire. La pauvreté est un phénomène très répandu. En effet, 73 p. 100 des locataires sont bénéficiaires d'allocations de loyer, et le nombre de familles monoparentales ne cesse d'augmenter.

La cité est une zone piétonnière, les véhicules n'étant autorisés à circuler que sur la route principale qui la ceinture ainsi que dans les terrains de stationnement à l'entrée des immeubles d'habitation. Des sentiers sillonnent les vastes espaces libres séparant les zones résidentielles des centres commerciaux et des autres services. En realité, les gens n'empruntent pas nécessairement les sentiers en raison des distances à parcourir (jusqu'à

trois kilomètres) et d'un éclairage de nuit déficient. Même le centre commercial est inadéquat et vétuste, et le pub qui s'y trouve est une source constante de conflits. Un certain nombre de groupes volontaires œuvrent dans le secteur, mais les services offerts aux jeunes sont insuffisants. De plus, les installations communautaires dont est pourvue l'école secondaire de Whitfield sont peu utilisées le soir en raison du fait que celle-ci est située dans un lieu isolé.

Le Whitfield Partnership

Le Whitfield Partnership fut créé en juin 1988 à la suite de la publication du livre blanc par le gouvernement. Son mandat consiste à élaborer et à coordonner la mise en œuvre d'une stratégie de revalorisation à long terme de Whitfield qui soit en accord avec les objectifs du gouvernement en matière de revalorisation urbaine. Cette association regroupe des représentants des gouvernements central et régional et des organismes nationaux qui s'occupent du logement et du développement économique et industriel ainsi que des membres de la collectivité. C'est une stratégie globale plutôt qu'un plan détaillé qu'elle met en avant pour assurer la revalorisation de Whitfield, et elle s'est fixé comme objectif de mettre à profit les forces du milieu et les efforts déjà déployés pour améliorer ce dernier.

La modification des conditions de logement et du milieu en général joue un rôle primordial dans la revalorisation de Whitfield, mais elle ne peut l'assurer à elle seule. En effet, l'amélioration de la situation de l'emploi, de la formation, de même que des installations communautaires constitue un élément essentiel du développement à long terme du milieu. La revalorisation ne pourra obtenir de succès durable sans un programme coordonné et soutenu d'investissement s'échelonnant sur les cinq à dix prochaines années. Il va sans dire que le défi à relever est de taille et que l'un des aspects du travail, et non le moindre, consiste à rallier les gens autour de la stratégie. C'est sur ce plan que l'alphabétisation peut jouer un rôle important dans la revalorisation de Whitfield.

L'éducation de base des adultes*

Comme on le sait, un tiers de la population adulte de Grande-Bretagne est reconnu comme ayant des besoins d'alphabétisation. Il y a donc lieu de s'attendre qu'un endroit comme Whitfield, défavorisé sur plusieurs plans et comptant de 10 000 à 12 000 habitants, ait grandement besoin de services d'alphabétisation. Pourtant, la plupart des zones de priorité sociale en Écosse sont mal servies dans ce domaine. En 1986, le Adult Basic Education Unit (Service d'alphabétisation) de Tayside n'offrait pour ainsi

* Dans la suite du texte, « adult basic education » sera traduit uniformément par alphabétisation.

dire aucun service à Whitfield, le plus important secteur défavorisé de la région. On n'y avait pas offert de formation de groupe en alphabétisation depuis plus de trois ans, principalement parce que la demande ne le justifiait pas. Ce n'est pas que ces services n'étaient pas offerts à la population de Whitfield, mais la publicité faite dans les journaux et à la télévision n'a jamais été fructueuse. La situation ne correspondait donc pas aux prévisions statistiques.

La formule généralement utilisée en Écosse pour l'alphabétisation des adultes consiste en une rencontre hebdomadaire de deux heures entre un tuteur et un apprenant. Une personne assure bénévolement la formation et rencontre l'apprenant individuellement. Selon les fonds disponibles, une aide professionnelle peut également être offerte, mais elle varie considérablement d'un endroit à l'autre du pays. On a recours aux bénévoles parce qu'ils constituent une main-d'œuvre enseignante « bon marché », mais c'est là une illusion, car ce type d'enseignement individuel nécessite beaucoup d'aide et de formation. Parallèlement, les participants doivent être très motivés et suffisamment confiants au départ pour admettre qu'ils ont un problème et se préparer à consacrer une grande partie de leur temps libre à étudier de manière autonome.

En 1986, on confia à un formateur en alphabétisation du Service de l'éducation permanente, à Dundee, la tâche d'essayer d'établir, dans le secteur de Whitfield, des activités d'alphabétisation répondant aux besoins du milieu. Il fallait privilégier une stratégie qui permettrait au Service d'éducation permanente de travailler avec le plus de personnes possible. Il était donc nécessaire de définir les différentes façons possibles d'assurer les services non seulement pour répondre aux besoins de la population de Whitfield, mais également pour tenter de rationaliser l'ensemble des services à l'intérieur de Tayside.

Les objectifs du projet furent donc établis comme suit :

a) Faire connaître à la population de Whitfield les services d'alphabétisation ;

b) Faciliter l'accès à l'alphabétisation pour les habitants de Whitfield ;

c) Établir des postes d'orientation dans le milieu pour permettre la liaison directe avec le centre de la rue Mitchell.

Le groupe d'alphabétisation habituel n'était pas la voie à privilégier. Il semblait préférable de s'efforcer de rendre Whitfield le plus autonome possible en faisant appel aux bénévoles et aux organismes du milieu, de même qu'en puisant à même les services éducatifs déjà offerts. On a donc établi un dialogue avec les animateurs ainsi que les bénévoles des nombreux organismes du milieu, plutôt que de créer un nouvel organisme.

Chacune des rencontres se déroulait sensiblement de la même façon. Le but était de faire connaître le Service d'éducation permanente, de s'informer sur le travail de l'organisme et de mettre en évidence les services d'alphabétisation dont pourraient bénéficier l'organisme et la population à laquelle il s'adresse. On espérait ainsi intéresser à l'alphabétisation les personnes rencontrées. L'une des priorités était de pourvoir de manière efficace et appropriée aux besoins exprimés. Le Service d'éducation permanente ne devait pas être le seul agent de formation; on espérait que l'établissement d'un réseau lui permettrait d'agir comme intermédiaire.

La réussite de cette démarche fut mitigée. Les rencontres avec les membres de la collectivité ont permis de confirmer l'existence de besoins en matière d'alphabétisation des adultes; il est probable qu'autrement, ces besoins n'auraient jamais été exprimés. On créa des groupes de formation pour répondre à la demande, et il fallut donc empiéter sur le temps prévu pour l'établissement du réseau. Au départ, les animateurs ne croyaient pas dans la participation du milieu, et tout laissait croire, après la première année, qu'ils avaient raison. Toutefois, la preuve était loin d'être faite.

Bien que la présence d'un responsable sur place ait éliminé certaines résistances à la participation, à l'engagement et à la motivation, il semble que nombre de barrières furent élevées par les responsables et les organismes eux-mêmes.

Des obstacles qu'on aurait pourtant pu éviter nuisirent énormément à l'accueil réservé aux services d'alphabétisation par la collectivité. Les problèmes mentionnés précédemment venaient restreindre l'accès aux postes d'orientation locaux, et l'on exerçait des pressions pour que les services soient établis dans les endroits sous-utilisés. Bon nombre des bénévoles recrutés qui avaient été formés au centre de la rue Mitchell travaillèrent en réalité à cet endroit plutôt qu'à Whitfield. Dans la conclusion de son rapport sur cette initiative, le responsable de l'époque a formulé d'importantes observations:

> «Étant donné la nature et l'étendue des problèmes que connaît la population de Whitfield, il semble évident qu'il faudrait consacrer plus de temps à l'alphabétisation. Même si les groupes de formation n'obtiennent qu'un accueil limité, cela vaut mieux que rien. Toutefois, comme les gens de l'endroit semblent réticents, les formules de nos groupes de formation auraient sûrement besoin d'être modifiées davantage pour être efficaces. Il semble que les organismes comme le nôtre doivent aller au devant de la collectivité plutôt que d'attendre que celle-ci vienne à eux. Dans les faits, il importerait d'adapter notre travail aux réalités et aux véritables besoins du milieu, soit en organisant des groupes de formation dans les endroits où les gens se rencontrent déjà, soit en

> intégrant nos activités à celles des gens ou à celles qu'ils souhaiteraient avoir. La formation en groupe ne peut être vue comme une panacée, car nombre d'obstacles, dont le manque de confiance, de sociabilité, d'espoir ou de connaissances, pourraient rendre les gens réticents à fréquenter un groupe d'alphabétisation ou tout autre groupe qui existe à Whitfield. Il faut trouver d'autres modes d'accès.»

L'échec des méthodes traditionnelles à Whitfield est attribuable aux facteurs mentionnés ci-dessus: faible motivation découlant du fait qu'on ne croit pas à l'importance de l'éducation; manque d'assurance; appui social et familial déficient et insécurité financière. Il était évident qu'une approche entièrement nouvelle devait être adoptée. Lorsque, en octobre 1988, le ministre de l'Éducation du Scottish Office annonça qu'une somme de 30 000 £ serait consacrée annuellement à la création, en Écosse, d'un centre d'alphabétisation des adultes, le Service d'éducation permanente de Tayside se montra très intéressé par la possibilité de mettre sur pied un projet innovateur.

Le délai pour le dépôt des soumissions était court, et à l'intérieur d'une semaine, le personnel du Service avait formulé une proposition visant l'établissement d'un centre d'alphabétisation qui devait être accessible et chaleureux. On souhaitait que le projet soit une initiative commune du gouvernement régional, des organismes volontaires et de la population de l'endroit.

Une fois l'idée lancée, on demanda aux organismes volontaires travaillant déjà avec le Service de devenir membres du regroupement qui soumettait les propositions. Voici ces organismes:

— Resource Centre for the Unemployed (Centre d'action pour les chômeurs) de Dundee;

— Aberlour Trust;

— Community Entreprises Support Team (Équipe de soutien à l'entreprise) de Tayside;

— Divers organismes communautaires.

Le Whitfield Adult Basic Education Trust (WABET) venait donc de naître de l'association de ces organismes volontaires de Whitfield. Essentiellement, il avait pour but de mettre sur pied un organisme composé entièrement de bénévoles (membres de la direction, tuteurs ainsi que participants), contribuant tous à cette approche nouvelle de l'alphabétisation des adultes. La subvention accordée au projet ne s'appliquait pas qu'à Whitfield, mais également aux ensembles résidentiels adjacents de Fintry et de

Mid-Craigie. Au moment de la définition des objectifs du projet d'alphabétisation à Whitfield, l'expérience acquise en 1986 se révéla importante, tout comme l'opinion qui circulait dans les milieux de l'alphabétisation en Écosse voulant que les méthodes traditionnelles ne soient efficaces que dans un nombre limité de situations. Les objectifs du projet étaient les suivants:

a) **Alphabétisation** — Dans l'ensemble, celle-ci devait se faire par la réalisation d'un travail sur un ou deux jours par semaine, plutôt que par le modèle traditionnel de deux heures de travail par semaine. On mettrait l'accent principalement sur le travail de groupe en visant l'acquisition d'habilités particulières, par exemple l'orthographe et le calcul en milieu de travail. On proposa également de réaliser des travaux portant sur des questions intéressant la population locale. Le WABET souhaitait atteindre les familles et les chômeurs de l'endroit, ainsi que les groupes du milieu. En raison de l'intérêt manifesté par l'un des organismes fondateurs, le Aberlour Trust, on décida de mettre l'accent sur le travail en famille, probablement en soirée, pour essayer de rompre le cercle de l'analphabétisme.

b) **Orientation éducative** — Le WABET proposa l'établissement d'un service d'orientation éducative qui tiendrait compte des possibilités d'emploi offertes sur le territoire de Tayside. Un service d'orientation sur les possibilités d'emploi et d'éducation pour les adultes serait également offert, le WABET ayant pris soin de communiquer avec les organismes locaux chargés de donner ces services.

c) **Formation en entreprise** — Une attention particulière serait accordée aux entreprises. On s'efforcerait de favoriser l'acquisition d'habilités et de motivation par le renforcement de la confiance, pour utiliser ensuite ces atouts afin de développer la compétence. On ne voyait pas le WABET comme un concurrent potentiel des autres organismes travaillant dans les entreprises; son rôle consisterait plutôt à essayer de développer les habiletés des participants de façon à rendre possible le travail en entreprise.

d) **Recherche d'emploi** — Le WABET souhaitait encourager l'enseignement de groupe en faisant appel à des modules SCOVTEC (Scottish Vocational Education Council) portant sur des sujets pertinents. L'apprentissage assisté par ordinateur et l'acquisition de connaissances de base en informatique seraient également possibles. On espérait de plus encourager le renforcement de la confiance par le travail de groupe et la communication en vue de l'acquisition d'une meilleure maîtrise des méthodes de recherche d'emploi.

Le projet d'alphabétisation fut ensuite soumis pour approbation au Scottish Office, et la confirmation d'une subvention annuelle de 30 000 £ en marqua le véritable départ. Il fallait maintenant trouver un local adapté aux besoins du projet. Trois possibilités s'offraient au WABET, soit un

poste de police désaffecté, un duplex avec entrée au rez-de-chaussée et un local commercial vacant ayant abrité une buanderie. L'idée d'établir le centre des opérations dans un local commercial était séduisante; cela ferait plus «sérieux» que les locaux habituellement utilisés pour les centres familiaux. Même si cette solution était la plus coûteuse des trois, elle semblait être la meilleure aux yeux de toutes les personnes intéressées.

Avant de se lancer dans un projet de la sorte, le WABET devrait acquérir un statut juridique plus approprié. Selon les plans, le WABET devait prendre la forme d'un organisme pourvu d'un acte constitutif semblable à celui de nombre d'autres organismes bénévoles, comptant des représentants du Conseil régional de Tayside de même que des membres de la collectivité. Lorsqu'on décida de louer le local cependant, il fallut changer ces plans.

La location du local nécessitait la signature d'un bail de vingt ans avec les propriétaires, ce qui était hors de question étant donné que le financement du projet ne s'étalait que sur trois ans. Après avoir échangé des lettres avec les propriétaires, on parvint à s'entendre sur un bail de quatre ans, pourvu que le WABET soit constitué en société à responsabilité limitée. D'autres facteurs, comme l'impôt et la responsabilité civile, faisaient pencher les membres d'origine pour la constitution en société à responsabilité limitée, et l'on demanda à l'avocat du WABET d'entreprendre les démarches nécessaires. Inévitablement, le travail s'en trouva ralenti, car le WABET dut attendre que soient satisfaites les exigences administratives et juridiques.

Entre-temps, on commença à mener une consultation à l'échelle locale. L'équipe avait hâte de faire participer la population aussi bien à la gestion qu'à la réalisation du projet. Il faut dire que le projet reçut une vive opposition au début, car une subvention lui avait été accordée sans que les gens de l'endroit aient véritablement été consultés. Les animateurs locaux de même que la population de Whitfield se montrèrent très désabusés (comme on pouvait s'y attendre) devant le «parachutage» d'un autre organisme dans le secteur. Whitfield était déjà le champ d'action de nombreux mouvements volontaires et groupes communautaires, ainsi que le théâtre de nombreux programmes d'aide en milieu urbain et de multiples initiatives de l'État. Les débuts du WABET Ltd. ont également coïncidé avec la naissance du Partnership Whitfield, subventionné par le gouvernement central.

Il n'y avait eu que très peu de consultations avec la population; c'est pourquoi de nombreux problèmes surgirent au cours des premières semaines. Certains affirmaient que la population ne devait pas appuyer le projet. D'autres, cependant, croyaient qu'en raison de la façon dont le projet avait dû être présenté, bien peu de place avait pu être faite à la consultation, mais que maintenant que le projet était aux portes de

Whitfield, il fallait lui accorder un appui inconditionnel. Une fois la situation éclaircie, la plupart des groupes communautaires se sont montrés heureux de la venue du projet à Whitfield. Une longue série de consultations publiques commença alors, pour ne prendre fin qu'en avril 1989, avec la formation de la société à responsabilité limitée. Après les premiers mois d'exploitation, les membres de la direction du WABET jouissaient de l'appui inconditionnel de la population, des politiciens de même que des fonctionnaires.

Lorsque les entrepreneurs mirent les pieds dans l'ancienne buanderie, l'équipe insista pour que l'endroit soit éclairé, attrayant et dépourvu de tout ce qui pourrait rappeler un bureau ou une école. Même les sièges choisis étaient des bergères et non pas des chaises de bureau. C'est vers cette période que la Training Agency (Agence de formation) fit savoir qu'elle avait aussi l'intention de subventionner le Learning Shop, et une somme de 20 000 £ fut accordée pour l'achat de matériel informatique. Il s'est avéré par la suite que ce matériel fut l'un des meilleurs achats réalisés. En effet, les ordinateurs et les appareils de traitement de textes ont attiré au centre de nombreuses personnes qui, autrement, n'en auraient probablement jamais franchi le seuil.

Les gens étaient prêts à admettre qu'ils n'avaient pas de connaissances en informatique et de là, à faire quelque chose à propos de leur analphabétisme, chose qui ne se serait jamais produite si ce n'avait été du matériel mis à leur disposition. Certaines erreurs furent commises au moment de l'achat du matériel, mais rien de vraiment grave. On se souvient qu'à cette période, les membres de la direction ainsi que les employés étaient extrêmement occupés et que les tâches devaient être assignées et exécutées très rapidement. Ce fut là, à plusieurs égards, un moment de consolidation pour l'équipe, et les liens solides tissés entre les membres de la direction et la coordonnatrice du projet ne se sont jamais rompus... bien qu'ils aient été éprouvés à maintes reprises.

Quelques mots en ce qui concerne les membres de la direction de WABET: celle-ci est assumée par huit personnes, soit deux de l'Administration municipale, une du Urban Aid Community Entreprise Support Team, une du Aberlour Trust et quatre de la population de Whitfield.

TÉMOIGNAGE DU COORDONNATEUR*

Comme on l'a dit précédemment, le succès de la mission d'alphabétisation des adultes en périphérie de Dundee n'a jamais été complet.

* Dans la présente section, Blair Denwette, coordonnateur du projet, relate son expérience personnelle dans la mise sur pied et la réalisation du projet.

Bien que j'aie manifesté certaines réserves au départ lorsqu'on m'a demandé d'assumer la coordination du projet, je trouvais cette perspective passionnante et j'y voyais un défi à relever: l'occasion m'était offerte d'aborder l'alphabétisation à partir d'un centre local en phase d'expérimentation.

J'ai d'abord établi des liens avec les animateurs du Service d'éducation permanente de Tayside dans le but de les mettre au courant du projet, puis de définir un réseau local d'organismes et de programmes administrés par la collectivité.

C'est à cette période que je me suis rendu compte que la communication et la collaboration avec tous ceux qui étaient engagés dans le milieu, à quelque titre que ce soit, étaient non seulement souhaitables mais essentielles. Le travail consistait donc à rallier la population dès le départ ou peu après.

Pendant cette étape préliminaire, nos deux principaux objectifs étaient de sensibiliser les gens et établir un service approprié dans le secteur, et de louer des locaux dans les environs.

Modèle de réseau

Ma façon d'aborder le premier objectif a été la suivante: recruter des bénévoles intéressés, du milieu même ou d'ailleurs (formateurs ainsi que participants déjà engagés en alphabétisation), pour discuter de la meilleure voie possible pour se mettre en rapport avec les intéressés. Après avoir longuement discuté avec le groupe, nous avons décidé d'adopter un «modèle de réseau». Tom Lovett, dans son article intitulé «Adult Education and Community Development — A Network Approach», parle de l'éducation des adultes comme d'un moyen de développement communautaire et décrit un projet réalisé à Liverpool comme un «modèle de réseau» (voir l'annexe 1). Cette approche a nécessité beaucoup de formation et de démarches, mais elle devait se révéler très efficace pour recueillir et transmettre de l'information.

J'ai donc établi les premiers liens moi-même, avec les objectifs suivants:

a) Cerner la nature de l'information que nous devrions diffuser à cette étape;

b) Nouer des liens avec les organismes locaux et déterminer des champs de collaboration;

c) Noter tout besoin immédiat en matière d'alphabétisation;

d) Obtenir des renseignements sur la façon de joindre les populations auxquelles les organismes et les services locaux s'adressent.

Après que le groupe eut défini une méthode précise pour traiter des questions mentionnées ci-dessus, il a élaboré une stratégie visant à faire gagner de l'assurance aux membres du groupe et à former les bénévoles à l'utilisation du réseau.

Cette formation visait entre autres la réponse aux besoins exprimés par le groupe et sa participation aux rencontres individuelles avec les responsables des organismes du milieu. En tant que coordonnateur du projet, j'ai visité, en compagnie d'un étudiant stagiaire, des organismes à qui l'on avait accordé la priorité afin de leur donner de l'information et également d'en recueillir. Les données réunies ont ensuite fait l'objet de discussions entre tous les membres du groupe, lesquels ont également veillé à les consigner, avant de fixer d'autres rencontres. Les deux premiers membres se sont ensuite séparés et se sont chargés de recruter deux autres membres du groupe, de manière à former une structure pyramidale visant à mener tous les membres du groupe à participer à l'exercice.

Le groupe a établi, pour consigner l'information recueillie, un organigramme facile à consulter et permettant de voir à quelle étape en étaient les relations.

C'est pendant cette période de rencontres qu'ont surgi de nombreux besoins éducatifs qui nécessitaient une réponse immédiate. Par exemple, pour certaines personnes, il n'était question que de se rafraîchir la mémoire sur l'orthographe, tandis que d'autres ne savaient pas exactement ce qu'elles voulaient, sinon que leur besoin avait un rapport avec la capacité de faire des apprentissages. En mettant à profit la compétence de nos formateurs, et grâce à la générosité des organismes locaux qui nous ont fourni un local et un service de garderie, nous avons pu répondre aux demandes du milieu dès le début de l'exercice. Il faut noter que ces demandes ne provenaient pas uniquement des groupes, mais également du grand public.

On ne devrait pas considérer le réseau comme un moyen ne devant être utilisé qu'une seule fois. Nous avons pu constater qu'il existait un besoin permanent d'affirmer et de réaffirmer notre engagement envers la collectivité.

La location d'un local

Tout en s'occupant de l'organisation de l'alphabétisation des adultes, la WABET, en consultation avec la collectivité, a dû chercher des locaux convenables et, comme on l'a déjà mentionné, a finalement déterminé que c'est un local commercial qui correspondait le mieux à ses besoins. On a

fait appel aux services d'architectes, et les plans réalisés ont été présentés aux autorités municipales pour que les importants travaux de remise à neuf puissent enfin débuter. Notre idée était que l'impression créée par une façade rappelant celle d'un commerce encouragerait les gens à profiter d'un service local d'éducation et d'orientation.

La société a dû résoudre nombre de gros casse-tête au début de son existence. À bien y penser cependant, nos incessantes allées et venues pour rencontrer les entrepreneurs ou les architectes nous ont permis de faire connaissance avec la population et les commerçants du quartier.

La cérémonie d'ouverture du Learning Shop s'est tenue au début du mois de septembre 1989.

L'existence de ce centre présentait de nombreux avantages. Les gens pouvaient, par exemple, y faire un saut pour y étudier, comme ils entreraient chez le marchand de journaux pour y acheter le journal. Le centre constituait également une source intarissable de possibilités d'apprentissage au sein de la communauté.

Il y avait cependant certains inconvénients, principalement associés au fait qu'il a fallu limiter l'extension des services pour satisfaire à des besoins en matière de personnel et de sécurité ainsi qu'aux exigences de l'exploitation quotidienne du Learning Shop.

L'équipe était composée, à cette étape, d'un coordonnateur de projet, de deux formateurs, l'un à temps plein et l'autre à temps partiel, d'un employé de bureau, d'un petit nombre de tuteurs rémunérés travaillant à temps partiel et de bénévoles. En décembre 1989, une subvention supplémentaire a permis d'engager un autre formateur à temps plein.

Publicité

Les services offerts et la participation des gens au cours des mois qui ont précédé l'ouverture du centre nous avaient amenés à nous pencher sur la façon de faire connaître le travail et l'importance de l'organisme. Les affiches et les brochures ont eu peu, voire pas du tout d'incidence, parce qu'elles ne reflétaient que l'aspect formation de base de nos services : cours d'orthographe, de préparation de budget, etc. Les annonces dans les journaux locaux n'ont soulevé aucun intérêt.

Les leçons tirées de cet exercice nous ont amenés à orienter notre démarche vers le dialogue pour aborder les conséquences des difficultés en lecture, écriture et calcul — par exemple, un père ou une mère incapable d'aider son enfant à faire ses devoirs, ou encore quelqu'un qui ne peut réclamer une prestation ou une allocation parce qu'il est incapable de lire les dépliants et de remplir les formulaires.

Notre principal véhicule publicitaire a donc été le bouche à oreille, qui s'est révélé particulièrement efficace pour promouvoir l'ordinateur en tant qu'outil de croissance personnelle et comme moyen de répondre aux besoins des adultes en matière d'alphabétisation.

La poursuite du dialogue amorcé avec les gens et les groupes du milieu nous a également amenés à nous diriger vers l'apprentissage axé sur leurs préoccupations, en y joignant l'alphabétisation. Au nombre des situations ayant servi à l'apprentissage, on compte celle où une personne demande de l'aide pour écrire une lettre concernant un problème d'humidité dans son logement, ou encore celle où un groupe tente de sensibiliser la collectivité à la valeur et à l'histoire des graffiti. S'attacher à ce genre de problèmes ou de préoccupations s'avère un puissant élément de motivation à l'apprentissage.

Escale au Learning Shop

Comme je le disais précédemment, le fait d'utiliser un local commercial comme centre de services présente de nombreux avantages: les gens peuvent y faire un saut pour y étudier, comme ils entreraient chez le marchand de journaux; le centre constitue également une source intarissable de possibilités d'apprentissage au cœur de Whitfield. Avant d'en arriver là cependant, l'équipe a dû travailler très fort, par l'intermédiaire du réseau, pour faire connaître dans le milieu le Learning Shop et les services qu'il pouvait offrir à la collectivité.

Le projet met à la disposition des personnes intéressées des services éducatifs souples, établis en fonction des besoins et des modes d'apprentissage de chacun. Certains peuvent avoir besoin d'un cours individuel hebdomadaire, tandis que d'autres utiliseront les locaux pour y étudier de manière autonome, en ne faisant que très peu appel à l'aide du formateur. On trouvera en annexe au présent chapitre des témoignages d'expériences personnelles ayant trait aux services souples offerts par le Learning Shop.

Enquête participative dans le milieu

L'adoption du « modèle de réseau » a permis d'amorcer le dialogue avec tous les organismes communautaires et ceux qui les fréquentent. Nous avions besoin d'une stratégie permettant d'atteindre les couches de la population qu'on ne pouvait joindre par l'intermédiaire des organismes communautaires. Nous avons donc formé un groupe d'utilisateurs et d'animateurs pour élaborer cette stratégie.

Les objectifs du groupe d'enquête participative peuvent se résumer comme suit:

1) Se mettre en rapport avec les personnes pour qui la scolarisation a été un échec et une expérience décevante;

2) Aider ces personnes à cerner les problèmes auxquels elles doivent faire face;

3) Les aider à mettre sur pied des programmes d'éducation et d'action à la lumière des problèmes cernés;

4) Les aider à se pencher sur leurs nouvelles connaissances ou sur leurs actes pour aborder les problèmes d'une manière plus créative ou d'un œil plus critique.

On peut dire que ces objectifs généraux correspondent à la description du processus éducatif exposée par Paulo Freire dans *Pédagogie des opprimés*.

Nous avons donc procédé à une enquête participative sur le terrain, pour laquelle nous avons fait appel aux bénévoles de l'endroit et avons utilisé du matériel technique (caméra vidéo, matériel audio et appareils photographiques). Le travail a été réalisé en quatre étapes:

1) Recrutement de bénévoles parmi les personnes utilisant déjà le service d'alphabétisation ainsi que parmi d'autres personnes intéressées par la démarche;

2) Formation à l'utilisation du matériel ainsi qu'à la façon de diffuser auprès de la population les documents produits;

3) Discussion sur les thèmes étudiés à l'aide du matériel audio et vidéo;

4) Présentation des documents et des thèmes à la population.

L'une des tâches confiées à certains membres du groupe d'enquête participative consistait à prendre en photos certains aspects de la vie quotidienne. Le seul travail des photographes était de répondre, pour chacune des photographies prises, à trois questions clés: Quel est le sujet que je photographie? Pour quelle raison est-ce que je le photographie? Pour qui est-ce que je le photographie?

Les photos ont ensuite été présentées à l'ensemble du groupe pour discussion et réflexion sur les principaux sujets d'intérêt. Cette façon d'aborder les problèmes s'est traduite par l'établissement d'un dialogue ouvert

et franc entre les membres du groupe. Ceux-ci ont eu tôt fait de soulever des questions fondamentales telles que les jugements de valeur, la discrimination et les préjugés. Finalement, ce travail a contribué à consolider le groupe et à solidifier ses forces.

L'une des questions relevées par le groupe était la disparition, à toutes fins utiles, d'une partie très importante de la population pendant l'été pour la cueillette des bleuets. Les terres agricoles des environs de Dundee sont bien connues pour la production de fruits à chair tendre, et les habitants de la région sont nombreux à se faire embaucher pour la saison estivale de la cueillette des fruits. Le groupe a donc décidé d'étudier cet exode par la photographie et de prendre note des réflexions, des impressions et des difficultés des gens concernant les habiletés nécessaires à la communication écrite et au calcul. Parmi les témoignages recueillis, on a relevé des phrases comme celle-ci: «Comment est-ce que je peux savoir si je me fais avoir, si je ne connais même pas la différence entre un kilo et une livre?»

Une fois le travail sur le terrain (visite des champs de bleuets) terminé et les films traités et développés, on a exposé les photos dans la vitrine du Learning Shop pour que les gens puissent les voir et faire des commentaires. Cet exercice, à l'instar d'autres activités de même nature, a encouragé beaucoup de gens à exprimer leurs besoins particuliers quant à l'acquisition d'habiletés de base.

Mother's Planning Group*

Le Mother's Planning Group (Groupe de planification à l'intention des mères) est formé de treize femmes qui se rencontrent un soir sur quatre. Elles se sont d'abord réunies de manière informelle et, à force de discuter, en sont venues à cerner certains aspects particuliers de leur vie.

L'enquête participative fonctionne comme suit: une fois qu'on a déterminé quelles sont les préoccupations de la collectivité, elles sont portées à l'attention de la population. Il s'agissait, en l'occurrence, des enfants et de la nécessité de disposer d'une salle et de jouets en matière souple. On s'est rendu compte que c'était en effet une nécessité, particulièrement pour les mères d'enfants ayant des besoins particuliers, car ces enfants semblaient laissés à l'écart.

La première partie de l'enquête participative visait la collecte de ce qu'on appelle les «données secondaires». Cette étape de la recherche consistait à réunir des connaissances sur la question. À cette fin, nous sommes

* Les pages qui suivent relatent l'expérience d'une formatrice qui a utilisé la méthode de l'enquête participative avec un groupe.

allées rencontrer les responsables d'autres groupes similaires, y compris le Rainbow House à Mid-Craigie et l'ALP à Édimbourg.

Nous avons conçu par la suite un questionnaire et les gens sont descendus dans la rue pour discuter du sujet avec la population et recueillir de l'information. Parallèlement, des questionnaires à l'intention des parents d'enfants ayant des besoins particuliers ont été envoyés dans plusieurs écoles, qui ont accepté d'en envoyer des copies aux parents de ces enfants.

Le groupe a tenu régulièrement des discussions sur l'information recueillie et lancé une campagne en vue de la création d'une salle pourvue de jouets en matière souple. À cette fin, on a réalisé des affiches et invité d'autres mères à joindre le groupe.

D'autres questions ont été abordées, soit la santé, le vandalisme, les excréments de chiens et l'insertion des adolescents ainsi que des retraités dans le quartier.

Une enquête photo sur le thème «No Place to Go» («nulle part où aller») est presentement en cours. Elle porte sur le manque de services dans le quartier.

À mesure que le travail du groupe progresse, on envoie des lettres, par exemple aux commerçants, à la clinique et à la garderie. On fait alors appel à de nouvelles habiletés pour mener la campagne: rédaction de lettres, préparation d'un budget, etc. De nouveaux cours d'alphabétisation sont mis sur pied pour répondre aux besoins.

L'enquête participative a ainsi permis d'établir l'équilibre entre l'action et la réflexion. La démarche éducative a été axée sur des questions qui préoccupent la population et a permis aux membres du groupe d'acquérir de l'assurance et des habiletés, comme l'écoute et le travail d'équipe.

Sensibilisation de ceux qui travaillent

La plus grande part du travail réalisé dans le cadre du projet a été consacrée à briser le cercle de l'analphabétisme et de l'humiliation qui en découle, en abordant les conséquences de l'incapacité de lire, d'écrire et de calculer. Il a fallu sensibiliser non seulement la population, mais également tous ceux qui étaient appelés à travailler auprès des analphabètes dans la région. Parmi eux, on compte les travailleurs sociaux, les policiers et le personnel des établissements scolaires. Nous avons donc organisé un séminaire à leur intention. Le taux de participation de même que la profondeur des discussions et l'intérêt pour le travail en collaboration nous ont paru très encourageants.

Voilà maintenant deux ans que le Learning Shop existe, et nous croyons nous être assimilés à la collectivité et être considérés comme l'un de ses membres. Nous avons accompli beaucoup grâce à l'expérimentation. Dans une large mesure, cette démarche se poursuit, et de nouvelles idées émanent de diverses sources à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur du milieu. Il est essentiel que nous nous penchions constamment sur la qualité de notre travail, par l'évaluation et la réflexion.

Pour conclure, j'ose espérer que cette démarche et l'oreille attentive que nous avons prêtée à la population nous permettront d'établir une fructueuse collaboration afin de créer un programme éducatif adapté, élaboré par la population elle-même. C'est ce but qui continuera de stimuler, d'alimenter et d'orienter notre travail dans le cadre du projet.

MODES DE FORMATION ET TYPES DE SERVICES

Formation des formateurs

Au départ, la participation de la population au projet WABET s'est établie en rapport avec la mise sur pied d'un programme éducatif sans limites fixes, qui serait instauré dans le milieu, pour et par celui-ci. Cette philosophie n'a été respectée que dans une certaine mesure. L'une des principales difficultés rencontrées est liée au mythe entourant l'éducation et les compétences nécessaires pour guider un adulte en alphabétisation. Si l'on ajoute à cela le manque d'assurance et d'amour-propre, on comprend pourquoi les gens de l'endroit ont parfois hésité à venir offrir leur aide. Par conséquent, il a fallu recruter les formateurs dans d'autres quartiers de Dundee, plus aisés, ce qui, malheureusement, portait à croire que la formation ne pouvait être donnée que par des gens de l'extérieur.

Néanmoins, un certain nombre de personnes de l'endroit ont acquis plus d'assurance en leurs capacités en s'attachant à répondre à leurs propres besoins d'apprentissage, ce qui leur permet maintenant de participer davantage à la formation d'autres apprenants. Pour ces personnes, c'est un cap qui vient d'être franchi; pour les responsables du projet, cette étape a exigé des efforts considérables pour faire naître la confiance et établir des liens.

La formation des formateurs du WABET a été mise au point en collaboration avec le Service d'éducation permanente de Tayside. Il s'agit d'un programme préparatoire de huit séances abordant les comportements, les connaissances et les compétences requises, comme l'orthographe et les bases de la lecture. Ce cours préparatoire devrait donner aux bénévoles les outils de base pour commencer à travailler avec un apprenant. Cependant, la véritable formation débute lorsque le formateur prend conscience des besoins particuliers de l'apprenant. La formation peut alors être adaptée pour répondre à ces besoins.

Comme le projet s'est éloigné du modèle traditionnel d'alphabétisation des adultes, il a fallu mettre sur pied un cours supplémentaire de formation au travail d'équipe à l'intention des formateurs. La formation s'étale sur six séances et aborde des sujets variant de la dynamique de groupe à la réflexion sur la façon de faciliter l'apprentissage de la lecture et du calcul (axé, par exemple, sur l'établissement d'un budget ou sur l'aide à apporter à ses enfants pour leurs devoirs) grâce au travail de groupe. On espère que le succès remporté par ce type de formation jusqu'à maintenant garantira plus de souplesse dans les services offerts actuellement par le Learning Shop.

L'objectif de l'alphabétisation est de déterminer quelles sont les habiletés et les forces des apprenants afin de les mettre en valeur. Une démarche holistique (axée sur la personne dans son ensemble) contribue à faire en sorte que la capacité de lire, d'écrire et de calculer ne forme qu'une partie d'un tout. Très souvent, les analphabètes se sentent humiliés et marginaux, et ont l'impression d'avoir échoué, d'avoir été rejetés par la société. Grâce au travail de collaboration réalisé dans le milieu, on s'efforce de dissiper ces impressions.

Comme on le mentionne dans la section portant sur la méthodologie, le Learning Shop offre un éventail de possibilités d'apprentissage: apprentissage assisté par ordinateur, formation en entreprise, éducation aux familles, cours d'alphabétisation, etc. Il offre également un service d'orientation scolaire, auquel on peut avoir accès soit en passant au Learning Shop, soit à la fin des cours, pour donner l'occasion aux participants de réfléchir à ce qu'ils pourraient faire par la suite. Comme les modes d'apprentissage diffèrent d'une personne à l'autre, on a prévu divers degrés de participation, soit l'enseignement individuel, le travail de groupe, le travail autonome et l'aide ponctuelle permettant de résoudre des problèmes particuliers.

Le libre accès au Learning Shop est en grande partie assuré grâce à la disponibilité des formateurs: un formateur, par exemple, devra être sur place un avant-midi ou un après-midi par semaine. Tout en ayant à répondre aux demandes immédiates, les bénévoles sont invités à utiliser le temps et les locaux mis à leur disposition pour se perfectionner. Une présence continue peut ainsi être assurée et l'on peut, de plus, cerner les besoins particuliers de formation des bénévoles (voir l'annexe 2, Témoignage d'une bénévole).

Types de services offerts

En ce qui concerne l'apprentissage assisté par ordinateur, le centre offre un éventail de possibilités d'apprentissage faisant appel à l'ordinateur à la fois comme un jeu et comme un outil de travail. Tout en utilisant

les ordinateurs au cours des rencontres individuelles avec les apprenants, le centre offre un cours d'initiation permettant aux participants de satisfaire leur curiosité, deux cours où l'on aborde les notions informatiques de base ainsi qu'un cours plus avancé pour ceux qui désirent approfondir leurs acquis. Les participants peuvent également réserver un ordinateur pour apprendre par eux-mêmes. Les ordinateurs sont utilisés pour apprendre la manipulation d'un clavier, la programmation de base et les techniques de base du traitement de textes. Par surcroît, on se sert de l'informatique pour faciliter la recherche d'emploi (rédaction de curriculum vitæ et de demandes d'emploi) et pour trouver des avenues pour poursuivre sa formation à partir de la base de données sur les possibilités d'accès à la formation contenue dans les «Training Access Points» («Points d'accès à la formation»). Finalement, l'informatique permet d'acquérir des connaissances de base dans un domaine particulier avant de poursuivre ses études à un degré plus avancé dans un établissement d'enseignement (voir l'annexe 3, Témoignage d'une ancienne participante).

Il existe une demande constante pour la formation en entreprise étant donné que la population de Whitfield se renouvelle sans cesse. Depuis sa création, le Partnership Whitfield s'efforce, par la mise en œuvre d'une stratégie sociale, de travailler de concert avec le milieu dans les champs d'intérêt général. Parallèlement, cette situation engendre des demandes de la part de personnes ayant besoin d'écrire des lettres ou de remplir des formulaires et de la part de trésoriers d'associations souhaitant acquérir les rudiments de la tenue de livres. On offre aux groupes des cours portant sur les techniques de communication, principalement sur l'écriture et l'expression orale, sur la présentation écrite et orale ainsi que sur la recherche et la collecte d'information. Ces cours permettent également aux membres des groupes de poursuivre leur démarche en bénéficiant d'autres services d'alphabétisation.

L'établissement de liens avec d'autres organismes du milieu permet au Learning Shop de trouver des sujets pour le travail de groupe, sujets qui ne sont pas toujours liés étroitement à l'alphabétisation. Déjà, on a reçu des demandes de formation à la tenue de livres et aux techniques de secrétariat de la part de membres d'associations du milieu. D'autres ont également manifesté le désir d'acquérir des méthodes d'étude. Des modules SOVTEC ont été mis au point avec l'aide du Service d'éducation permanente. Les modules présentement offerts s'intitulent «Options and Choices» («Choix personnels») et «Communications II». On cherche également des moyens d'accroître l'engagement de la population dans les services de formation des adultes dans les écoles.

En dehors du Learning Shop, plusieurs autres endroits offrent des services. Le Family Centre (Centre de la famille) de St. Matthew, qui assure un service de garderie, reçoit le groupe d'apprenants en tenue de livres, un groupe de gens qui retournent aux études ainsi qu'un groupe de création

littéraire. Un groupe de pères, composé d'hommes assumant seuls l'éducation de leurs enfants, se réunit au Family Centre de Whitfield. Ils y partagent leurs expériences et leurs craintes avec les autres membres du groupe et en viennent à s'interroger sur ce que la formation peut leur apporter personnellement, et sur la façon dont cela peut se faire. L'église de Fintry accueille un Groupe de planification à l'intention des mères. Ce groupe a relevé divers sujets d'intérêt pour les membres de la communauté, soit la santé, la vandalisme, l'insertion des adolescents et des retraités, et le manque de services dans le milieu. Les femmes y acquièrent des habiletés leur permettant de traiter ces questions.

Un groupe se réunit à Mid-Craigie en vue d'amorcer une enquête sur les besoins de la population de l'endroit. C'est là un «nouveau terrain» et l'intérêt y est pratiquement inexistant. Il sera peut-être nécessaire d'envisager une autre approche.

L'éducation aux familles vise particulièrement à aider les parents aux prises avec des problèmes, que ce soit en contribuant à l'éducation de leurs enfants à l'aide de l'ordinateur ou en revendiquant de meilleurs services pour les jeunes dans le quartier. Bien qu'il existe des modules d'apprentissage réalisés par l'Université libre, ils posent des problèmes de compréhension et n'ont par conséquent été que très peu utilisés pour le travail de groupe.

Parmi les démarches les plus intéressantes, on note les projets d'enquête participative qui font appel à la méthode de Freire pour aider la population à cerner et à approfondir les questions qui lui tiennent à cœur. Le groupe des pères et le Groupe de planification à l'intention des mères ont tous deux vu le jour de cette façon; un groupe qui s'intéresse à l'histoire est également né à Whitfield, en mai 1990, et poursuit toujours ses activités. L'un des projets d'enquête participative qui a suscité le plus d'intérêt est celui qui portait sur la saison des bleuets. Les données et les photographies s'y rapportant ont été classées dans un album pour être utilisées à l'étape de l'analyse. Un projet de nature similaire portant sur les graffiti qui couvrent les murs de Whitfield a aussi été réalisé, et un album de photos de ces graffiti a été l'objet de discussions avec la collectivité.

Difficultés rencontrées

On a relevé un certain nombre de facteurs qui nuisaient à la poursuite des rencontres entre les apprenants et les formateurs à la suite de la première rencontre. On note, entre autres, la difficulté à entrer en communication avec les apprenants par téléphone ainsi que divers autres facteurs d'ordre social, financier ou personnel. Un nouveau service d'orientation a donc été mis sur pied en août 1990. Ce service fonctionne à partir d'une liste de bénévoles expérimentés qui, à tour de rôle, peuvent venir

en aide rapidement aux personnes intéressées et travailler ainsi à créer une première rétroaction positive. Pour des éducateurs, travailler dans un quartier défavorisé, qui est dépourvu de services appropriés pour les enfants et où les gens sont peu réceptifs, pose des problèmes de taille. Une grande partie du travail de l'équipe consiste à trouver des moyens d'assurer des services pour les enfants et d'alléger les problèmes d'argent en collaboration avec les autres organismes locaux.

On s'est aperçu, dès les débuts du Learning Shop, que le climat détendu et ouvert qui régnait au centre et la démarche utilisée en éducation des adultes risquaient d'entraîner un certain relâchement. Par conséquent, il a fallu imposer un certain nombre de règles de base aux participants afin qu'il y ait un équilibre entre la formation et la socialisation.

Toutes les mesures prises par le WABET sont le fruit d'un franc dialogue entre les animateurs et la collectivité au sujet de ses préoccupations. Voilà pourquoi elles donnent des résultats positifs.

PRINCIPALES LEÇONS TIRÉES DU PROJET

Parmi les conclusions qu'on a pu tirer du projet, quelles sont celles qui permettront au WABET d'offrir des services d'alphabétisation plus appropriés à ses apprenants et d'aider les organismes de financement à comprendre ce à quoi ils doivent s'attendre?

La première conclusion concerne le temps qu'il faut laisser aux choses pour démarrer, particulièrement dans les milieux défavorisés. Les organismes de financement ne doivent pas s'attendre à récolter instantanément les fruits d'un projet de cette envergure qui, en raison de sa nature même, est une entreprise à long terme. On a besoin de temps afin de gagner la confiance de la population, qui se méfie naturellement des «professionnels» de l'animation sociale. Souvent, les gens du milieu perçoivent ces derniers comme des missionnaires, qui auront vite fait de quitter la région une fois leur travail terminé; bien souvent, les animateurs eux-mêmes sont à blâmer pour l'image qu'ils projettent.

On se rend compte toutefois que lorsqu'on se met à l'écoute de la population et que l'on travaille avec elle, il peut se former une association valable qui, pour reprendre les termes employés par Blair Denwette, se traduira par un programme éducatif adapté à la collectivité, implanté dans le milieu et, par-dessus tout, construit par la population elle-même.

Se mettre à l'écoute du milieu, former des réseaux et concevoir un programme éducatif nécessitent beaucoup de ressources, en particulier des ressources humaines très disponibles et de l'argent. On a également appris, grâce au projet, qu'il était important d'obtenir le financement approprié,

à la fois pour payer le personnel du centre et pour continuer d'assurer l'utilisation du réseau et l'extension des services. Ceux qui financent le projet ont malheureusement tendance à s'attendre à des résultats remarquables à peu de frais; les réalisations véritables et durables, dans ce domaine, ne sont toutefois possibles que si l'on dispose de fonds suffisants. Les gens n'entrent pas, tout simplement, dans un centre pour y «acheter» leur formation. Ils ont besoin de savoir ce qu'on leur offre; par conséquent, il doit y avoir des mécanismes pour diffuser l'information, et quelqu'un doit forcément payer la note.

En ce qui concerne la publicité, le projet a clairement démontré que l'annonce des cours était une méthode tout à fait inefficace, alors qu'en s'adressant directement aux gens du milieu qui sont de près ou de loin intéressés par la question, on pouvait obtenir des résultats probants. Les affiches et les brochures ont peu d'effets immédiats, mais la publicité faite par les apprenants eux-mêmes, par les formateurs et par les bénévoles s'est révélée le moyen le plus efficace pour rallier la population locale.

En ce qui concerne le programme éducatif, dans nombre de zones de priorité sociale, on doit aborder le sujet de l'alphabétisation en empruntant des détours. Très peu de personnes sont prêtes à demander de l'aide pour apprendre à lire et à écrire. Par contre, plusieurs sont intéressées à acquérir des habiletés techniques de base, telle l'utilisation du traitement de textes. On vise, dans les deux cas, le même objectif, c'est-à-dire donner la chance aux gens d'améliorer leur capacité fondamentale de communiquer grâce à des outils qui les attirent.

Il est essentiel de faire preuve d'une certaine souplesse et d'une certaine volonté d'adapter les méthodes d'alphabétisation pour qu'elles concordent avec l'idée changeante que se font les apprenants de leurs besoins éducatifs. Sinon, ceux-ci délaisseront bien entendu le service.

L'image du projet est déterminante, à la fois en ce qui a trait à la nouvelle technologie et au but du projet. De toute évidence, le but visé par le WABET était la formation, alors tous les apprenants ont travaillé en vue des objectifs d'apprentissage qu'ils avaient définis pour une courte période. Ces objectifs ont été redéfinis par la suite. Cela signifie que les apprenants ne se présentaient pas au centre simplement parce qu'ils y trouvaient un clima. chaleureux dans lequel ils se sentaient à l'aise.

Puisque ce projet est le seul du genre en Écosse, il a suscité énormément d'intérêt dans les organismes à travers tout le pays. Parfois, les visites de personnes intéressées par le projet semblaient retenir toute l'attention au détriment du travail réel du centre. L'intérêt qu'on nous a montré ainsi que les questions soulevées par nos méthodes de travail nous ont permis de remettre en question et d'évaluer constamment notre travail et notre philosophie.

Le WABET constitue une sorte de pont entre les organismes d'alphabétisation et le système scolaire. En effet, on peut y faire les apprentissages de base, puis profiter des possibilités offertes par le projet pour poursuivre sa formation. On doit se rappeler qu'un adulte non familiarisé avec ce type d'activités peut se sentir à la fois effrayé et attiré par les efforts que demande la poursuite des études. L'orientation éducative a joué un rôle déterminant; elle a aidé les gens qui ont fait les premières démarches pour retourner aux études à y voir plus clair quant à leurs aspirations et aux chemins qu'ils pouvaient emprunter. Les services d'orientation offerts au Learning Shop et aux groupes d'apprenants ont constitué un moyen essentiel de s'assurer que les gens connaissaient les possibilités et les options qui s'offraient à eux.

Finalement, nous avons pu constater quelle était l'importance du projet en ce qui a trait au perfectionnement des ressources humaines. Nous avons déjà discuté de l'élimination de la distinction entre les apprenants et les formateurs. Nous avons également parlé de l'augmentation de la confiance en soi chez les personnes inscrites à un programme éducatif. En effet, toute personne qui participe à ce genre de programme a une influence positive sur sa famille, sur son milieu et sur l'économie dans son ensemble. Puisque chaque apprenant est susceptible d'influencer directement au moins trois autres personnes (un enfant, son conjoint, un parent ou un ami), les avantages pour la collectivité, à long terme, sont incalculables. La revalorisation d'un milieu, de quelque nature qu'elle soit, ne peut se faire sans l'appui inconditionnel et la participation entière des gens. Si vous parvenez à motiver quelqu'un, vous serez sans aucun doute près d'atteindre votre but.

Annexe 1

LA COMPOSITION DU WHITEFIELD PARTNERSHIP

1. Réseau WABET
2. Whitfield Labour Club (Association de travailleurs de Whitfield)
3. Fintry Womans Section (Division des femmes de Fintry)
4. Services sociaux
5. St. Matthew Family Centre (Centre de la famille de St. Matthew)
6. Social Work Department (ministère des Affaires sociales)
7. Organismes locaux (publics)
8. Whitfield Health Steering Group (Groupe d'orientation sur la santé de Whitfield)
9. Services de santé
10. Fintry Health Clinic (Clinique médicale de Fintry)
11. Bibliothèque de Whitfield
12. Services d'éducation
13. Organismes locaux (privés)

Annexe 2

LA FORMATION D'UNE FORMATRICE BÉNÉVOLE

Je m'appelle Maureen Smith. À 39 ans, alors que j'étais une femme au foyer, j'ai découvert que pour la première fois depuis bon nombre d'années, je n'avais à me soucier que de ma propre personne. Puisque mon fils venait de quitter la maison et que mon époux travaillait, je n'avais plus de raisons de remettre les projets que j'avais en tête.

J'avais quitté le marché du travail depuis environ dix ans. La plupart des postes que j'avais occupés étaient dans le domaine du secrétariat. Lorsque j'ai commencé à chercher du travail, je me suis vite aperçue que j'ignorais tout du matériel utilisé aujourd'hui dans un bureau, que ce soit les appareils de traitement de textes, les ordinateurs ou les télécopieurs.

Je me suis donc renseignée sur l'éducation complémentaire et j'ai ainsi entendu parlé des possibilités de travailler comme bénévole. J'ai ensuite téléphoné à M. Brian Maddox, dans Mitchell Street, qui m'a invitée à venir bavarder avec lui. Je dois admettre que j'ignorais même qu'il pouvait exister des services comme l'alphabétisation. J'avais entendu parlé, par la télévision et les journaux, des problèmes que pose l'analphabétisme. Mais ce n'est que lorsque j'ai parlé avec Brian que j'ai compris à quel point les personnes qui ne savent ni lire ni écrire pouvaient éprouver de la difficulté à se débrouiller dans la vie de tous les jours.

Brian m'a donné de la documentation ainsi que le nom de personnes qui pourraient me renseigner. Parmi ces noms se trouvait celui de M. Blair Denwette, du Learning Shop de Whitfield. J'ai donc pris rendez-vous. Cela se passait en décembre 1990, et depuis lors, j'ai l'impression d'en avoir appris beaucoup. Je m'étais inscrite aux cours de formation de formateurs, mais la session ne commençait pas avant le 15 janvier. Lorsque j'ai expliqué que je ne possédais pas beaucoup d'expérience. et particulièrement en informatique, Blair m'a recommandé, à ma grande surprise, de passer quelques heures au centre et d'apporter mon aide ça et là, au besoin. Il m'a été très facile d'accepter, mais me présenter au Learning Shop sans en connaître les besoins de base, ce fut une autre histoire. Il n'en demeure pas moins que le matin du 3 décembre 1990, je me présentai comme convenu à Whitfield. À la fin de la journée, je sentis que pour la première fois depuis longtemps, j'avais accompli quelque chose. Des membres du personnel, très gentils et serviables, m'avaient fait visiter l'endroit. Il n'y avait rien pour les dérouter. Je suis de ces personnes qui posent sans cesse des questions; eh bien, on a trouvé réponse à toutes mes questions.

On m'a mise à l'aise dès la première journée. On m'a encouragée et dirigée, de sorte que j'ai commencé à me rendre compte que je pourrais peut-être à mon tour me perfectionner dans un domaine pour aider les autres.

À la fin de la semaine, j'avais déjà acquis les rudiments de l'informatique. À mes yeux, la chose la plus importante était qu'après avoir observé et écouté tout ce qui se faisait ou se disait dans le centre, j'étais, bien sûr, étonnée par les services qui y étaient offerts, mais j'étais surtout ébahie par les moyens employés par le personnel pour s'occuper des nouveaux apprenants. Il n'y avait rien que les employés ne puissent faire. S'ils n'étaient pas en mesure de fournir eux-mêmes l'aide nécessaire, ils ne laissaient personne repartir les mains vides. Ils approfondissaient leurs recherches pour trouver une solution aux problèmes, quels qu'ils soient.

Le mois de décembre tirait à sa fin. Je commençais à gagner de l'assurance dans mon travail et j'avais hâte que l'heure de ma véritable formation arrive, en espérant que je pourrais, moi aussi, devenir une formatrice bénévole.

Un jour, lorsque le personnel préparait le matériel en vue du cours d'un des groupes, j'ai offert mon aide et on m'a demandé de faire des photocopies. Je devais agrandir un texte, mais je n'arrivais pas à déchiffrer ce qui y était écrit. Alors évidemment, je l'ai demandé. J'ai été étonnée d'apprendre que c'étaient des souhaits de Noël et du Nouvel An en gaélique. À mes yeux, cela aurait pu être du français, de l'allemand ou de l'arabe, bref n'importe quelle langue étrangère. C'est alors que j'ai compris ce que doivent ressentir les gens qui sont incapables de lire l'anglais. Je pense que ce serait un bon exemple à utiliser pour faire comprendre ce que l'on peut ressentir lorsqu'on ne peut pas lire.

Quelques jours avant la fermeture du centre en vue du congé des fêtes de fin d'année, l'une des formatrices a été dans l'impossibilité, pour des raisons de santé, de se présenter et de prévenir l'apprenante qu'elle devait rencontrer. Lorsque l'apprenante est arrivée au centre, on m'a demandé si je voulais apporter mon aide. Je dois dire que j'étais à la fois empressée et nerveuse. Toutefois, l'apprenante m'a vite mise à l'aise, et j'ai constaté que je m'amusais beaucoup. J'avais observé les formateurs pendant quelques semaines, mais comme dans n'importe quoi, les formateurs font en sorte que tout ait toujours l'air très facile. C'est à ce moment-là, et pas avant, que j'ai compris la nécessité de recevoir une formation.

Après le départ de l'apprenante, j'ai demandé à M^me^ Audrie Taylor de m'expliquer quelque chose. À un moment donné pendant la séance, je lui ai expliqué que l'apprenante avait commencé à me parler d'elle-même, et que l'on débordait du sujet. C'est alors que j'ai compris que je ne savais pas comment le dire sans froisser l'apprenante.

Audrie m'a affirmé qu'elle m'avait observée et que j'avais fait ce qu'il fallait. Cependant, comme je l'ai dit plus haut, c'est à ce moment-là que j'ai compris que les apparences sont trompeuses.

J'aimerais conclure en disant que je souhaite en apprendre suffisamment pour transmettre des connaissances à d'autres et parvenir ainsi, je l'espère, à les aider. En tâchant d'atteindre cet objectif, j'ai déjà beaucoup appris moi-même.

Je suis très reconnaissante à Blair pour la chance qu'il m'a donnée. Même si je ne réussissais pas le cours de formatrice bénévole, les quelques semaines de formation ne seraient pas perdues, puisque j'ai vraiment profité de l'expérience.

Annexe 3

TÉMOIGNAGE D'UNE ANCIENNE PARTICIPANTE

J'étais en chômage depuis six mois et ne possédais aucune expérience en traitement de textes. J'ai donné mon nom au centre d'emploi de Whitfield et on m'a dirigée au WABET. J'ai assisté aux cours tous les mardis. Je me suis ensuite trouvé un emploi et j'ai continué d'y aller pendant l'heure du dîner, le mercredi. Après environ huit séances au WABET, je m'étais déjà un peu familiarisée avec le traitement de textes. Le personnel du WABET m'a beaucoup aidée, en procédant étape par étape, et en répétant au besoin lorsque je n'avais pas bien saisi.

Je crois que je n'ai plus besoin d'assister aux cours, car mon employeur m'a inscrite à un cours intensif de traitement de textes.

Je recommande le WABET à tous ceux qui souhaitent approfondir leurs connaissances.

RECHERCHE PARTICIPANTE EN ALPHABÉTISATION: OÙ EN SOMMES-NOUS?*

Mary Hamilton
Roz Ivanic
David Barton
Université de Lancaster
Grande-Bretagne

* Texte traduit de l'anglais.

INTRODUCTION

Dans le présent article, nous décrivons nos tentatives de lier la recherche et la pratique dans le domaine de l'alphabétisation des adultes. Nous exposons nos objectifs, le degré auquel, à notre avis, nous les avons réalisés, de même que les principales règles pratiques qui sous-tendent notre démarche. Nous faisons également le rapprochement entre notre travail et quelques-unes des démarches similaires qui ont alimenté nos propres idées.

Quoique attachés à une université, nous travaillons, à titre de membres du groupe Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RAPAL — Recherche et pratique en alphabétisation des adultes), en étroite collaboration avec des praticiens et des étudiants en alphabétisation qui cherchent de nouveaux modes de réflexion par rapport à leur expérience et de nouvelles façons d'utiliser leurs connaissances. Synthèse d'idées provenant de nombreuses sources, le présent article pourra servir, nous l'espérons, à ceux qui sont intéressés à trouver de nouveaux modèles de recherche sur l'activité humaine — des modèles nous permettant de partager pouvoirs et connaissances et de confirmer la validité des expériences de première main en tant que sources d'information aussi valables que les mesures «objectives» habituellement privilégiées.

QU'EST-CE QUE LA RECHERCHE?

Qu'est-ce que la recherche? Est-ce une activité de la vie de tous les jours? Quelles sont les activités que l'on peut considérer comme de la recherche? Il est parfois difficile de déterminer si une activité constitue ou non un travail de recherche, comme dans les exemples qui suivent: faire signer une pétition afin de convaincre le conseil municipal d'installer des lampadaires dans les rues; tenter de découvrir les raisons qui poussent les gens à se joindre à un groupe d'alphabétisation; se renseigner sur les possibilités d'apprentissage dont souhaiteraient disposer les habitants de son quartier; découvrir pourquoi les gens mettent des points là où ils le font lorsqu'ils écrivent; interroger les gens sur leurs impressions en ce qui concerne les variantes régionales de leur langue; dresser le portrait de l'école d'il y a vingt ans; chercher à savoir si les écoles de son quartier sont intéressées à former des groupes d'aide aux parents et à découvrir ce qui marche et

ce qui ne marche pas; tenter de trouver ce qui plaît aux élèves dans leur groupe d'alphabétisation; prouver aux gens que la dyslexie est un problème réel.

À notre avis, toutes ces activités demandent un travail de recherche. La recherche consiste à poser des questions, à dégager des tendances générales et à chercher, de façon systématique, l'information dont on a besoin pour répondre à ces questions. La recherche peut être utile pour convaincre certaines personnes de quelque chose que l'on sait déjà, et elle consiste alors à trouver les façons de consigner l'information et de la communiquer. (Pour de plus amples renseignements et d'autres exemples concernant la définition de la recherche, consulter le *Rapal Bulletin*, nos 9 et 12; Ivanic et Baynham, 1985; Lobley, 1988; Barton et Murphy, 1990.)

POURQUOI VOULOIR LIER RECHERCHE ET PRATIQUE?

Il est coutume de réserver la recherche à une poignée de spécialistes: fonctionnaires, journalistes, universitaires. Quelques personnes sont chargées de poser les questions... quant aux autres, qui constituent la majorité, leur rôle se limite à y répondre. Leurs propres questions ne sont pas remarquées, et on ne semble même pas y accorder d'importance. On appelle le modèle traditionnel de recherche «recherche objective», ce qui sous-entend que cette dernière est neutre et qu'elle rend compte plus fidèlement de la réalité. Cependant, cette recherche s'effectue de l'extérieur et reflète, par conséquent, l'opinion de personnes qui ne savent pas ce qu'on peut ressentir dans la situation en question et pour qui les enjeux ne sont pas aussi importants que pour ceux qui sont directement intéressés. Cette distanciation est perçue comme un avantage. Toutefois, on peut facilement affirmer le contraire et dire qu'observer de l'extérieur limite de façon inacceptable la compréhension des choses ainsi que la capacité d'action pour les transformer. Le point de vue d'une telle recherche n'est ni objectif ni impartial, il n'est que différent. S'il n'est pas confronté avec des points de vue de l'intérieur, il risque d'être tout à fait partial.

Pour reprendre les termes d'un praticien américain: «Dans un tel cadre, on considère rarement les gens ordinaires comme capables de connaître leur propre réalité [...] les gens sont des sujets de recherche, et le savoir sur leur vie est créé et transmis par de soi-disant experts» (traduction de l'anglais, Gillespie, 1989).

Le modèle traditionnel de recherche a contribué à renforcer les barrières qui séparent les chercheurs de ceux qui en sont l'objet, les universitaires des praticiens, creusant ainsi un fossé au-dessus duquel on se regarde d'un œil méfiant. Ce fossé constitue, dans la pratique, un obstacle au travail d'équipe.

Nous étions insatisfaits des méthodes employées dans la recherche traditionnelle et de ce qui y est considéré comme source valable d'information, et du fait que certains éléments y sont laissés pour compte, voire dédaignés. Nous étions déçus de la façon dont est perçue la recherche en raison de ces facteurs. C'est pourquoi nous avons essayé d'introduire un autre modèle en alphabétisation. Au Royaume-Uni, le domaine de l'éducation de base des adultes s'est développé rapidement grâce à de nombreuses innovations, mais avec peu de ressources. On n'a généralement pas diffusé sur une vaste échelle les rapports — encore faudrait-il qu'on en ait rédigé — ou les autres données consignées concernant les projets innovateurs, pas plus qu'on en a systématiquement assuré le suivi.

Au moment de la mise sur pied du groupe Rapal, pratiquement aucun travail de recherche n'avait été effectué dans le domaine. Après dix années d'expérience en éducation de base au Royaume-Uni, nombre de ceux qui s'intéressaient à la question ont ressenti le besoin de prendre un recul afin de réfléchir et d'échanger sur tout ce qui s'était passé. Au Royaume-Uni, l'éducation de base s'est développée sous la forte influence d'une philosophie axée sur l'apprenant qui va à l'encontre du modèle traditionnel de recherche. De là découlent la possibilité et la nécessité de faire les choses différemment.

RECHERCHE ET PRATIQUE: NOS ACTIONS (ET D'AUTRES)

Au départ, nous étions au courant de quelques travaux antérieurs qui se rapprochaient du travail d'alphabétisation: recherches faites par des enseignants dans les écoles (Rudduck et Hopkins, 1985; Walker, 1985; Duckworth, 1986), publications d'organisations communautaires (Morley et Worpole, 1982; Fitzpatrick, 1990), concept de développement communautaire (Lovett, Clarke et Kilmurray, 1983), principes de Paulo Freire et notion d'éducation populaire qui s'est dégagée de son travail (Freire, 1985; Kirkwood et Kirkwood, 1989; Arnold et Burke, 1983). À mesure que nous avancions dans notre démarche, nous nous apercevions que des gens poursuivaient les mêmes objectifs que nous, bien que dans autres domaines ou sur d'autres aspects. Entre autres, des auteures féministes et des chercheurs à l'affût de nouvelles façons de documenter l'expérience et les points de vue des femmes (Roberts 1981; Spender, 1980; Olson, 1980; Acker, Barry et Esseveld, 1983), des historiens de la tradition orale (Duffin, 1989), la recherche-action dans les organismes d'éducation ou autres (The Talk Workshop Group, 1982; Goswami et Stillman, 1987; Reason, 1988), recherche qui est généralement de petite échelle, centrée sur une série de situations déterminées, un problème ou une innovation, et qui consiste à consigner les changements à mesure qu'ils se produisent.

Toutes ces pratiques mènent à une conception «participative» de la recherche, selon laquelle les personnes visées par la recherche ont un

droit de regard sur les travaux ainsi que sur les décisions qui en découlent (voir Hall, 1984; Participatory Research Network, 1982).

Nous découvrons encore des traces qui se rapprochent de nos préoccupations, ce qui nous permet d'articuler plus clairement ce que nous percevons comme les assises de notre démarche, les principes clés d'une approche participative de la recherche en alphabétisation. Nos propres travaux visent surtout à découvrir le sens que les adultes donnent à l'alphabétisme, leurs usages de la lecture et de l'écriture et leurs façons d'apprendre. Toutefois, ceux qui apprennent à lire et à écrire n'ont pas nécessairement une vision aussi étroite de l'utilisation qu'ils peuvent faire de la recherche à leurs propres fins. Au fur et à mesure qu'ils se font entendre durant la recherche, les règles changent.

Le groupe Rapal a amorcé ses activités en organisant une suite de conférences permettant aux praticiens et aux chercheurs de se rencontrer. Bien que notre but premier ait été de formuler des questions sur lesquelles axer la recherche, nous nous sommes rapidement penchés sur des questions plus générales, comme ce qu'est la recherche et ce qu'elle englobe, étant ainsi amenés à critiquer le modèle traditionnel et à nous demander qui y fait quoi et pourquoi, et à qui cela profite. La première démarche a été de former un réseau, principalement à l'intérieur du Royaume-Uni, mais également ouvert à ceux qui à l'étranger partageaient la même ligne de pensée. C'est alors que le groupe Rapal a fait paraître son premier bulletin périodique, qui devait permettre de traiter de la recherche d'une façon accessible et de faire connaître des rapports et des projets qui, autrement, ne seraient jamais publiés. La rédaction et la publication du bulletin sont le fruit d'un travail collectif grâce auquel nous avons pu renforcer nos liens et définir nos buts plus clairement.

Nous souhaitons ici parler de deux autres activités grâce auxquelles nous commençons à faire de nouveaux liens et à découvrir les difficultés et les satisfactions que nous réserve notre démarche de rapprochement de la recherche et de la pratique.

Tout d'abord, nous avons mis sur pied des ateliers portant sur les méthodes de recherche qui demandent à la fois la participation des apprenants et des enseignants en éducation de base. Ensuite, nous avons travaillé en collaboration avec des personnes qui apprennent de nouvelles façons d'écrire afin d'étudier les processus et les changements qui interviennent au cours de cet apprentissage.

ATELIERS SUR LA RECHERCHE

Nous décrirons d'abord les ateliers de fin de semaine sur la recherche que nous avons aidé à mettre sur pied. L'un avait été organisé par

le Lee Community Education Centre de Londres, et l'autre, par le Bradford Community College et le Ilkley Community College, situés dans le nord de l'Angleterre. Les conclusions tirées de ces ateliers sont exposées dans des articles du *Rapal Bulletin* ainsi que dans un autre article, plus exhaustif (voir le *Rapal Bulletin*, n^os^ 9 et 12; McMahon *et al.*, 1991). Les ateliers étaient inspirés du modèle d'un séminaire de fin de semaine organisé auparavant par la National Federation of Voluntary Education Schemes (NFVES); au cours de ce séminaire, élèves, tuteurs et chercheurs s'étaient rencontrés afin de mettre sur pied un projet collectif, qu'ils réalisèrent ensemble par la suite et dont ils rédigèrent un compte rendu (Mace et Moss, 1988).

Chaque réunion portait sur un nouveau point. Au cours du séminaire de fin de semaine tenu au Lee Centre, on a offert des séances sur les techniques de recherche, au cours desquelles on a abordé les points suivants: techniques d'entrevue, cas de dyslexie, dynamique de groupe, recrutement de formateurs noirs, utilisation de la vidéo, préparation de questionnaires, recours aux anecdotes personnelles et finalement, rédaction et publication des résultats de la recherche.

Au séminaire de fin de semaine tenu au Bradley Community College, de petits groupes travaillaient à la planification de leur projet de recherche, pendant que certaines personnes étaient invitées à faire état des recherches qu'elles avaient menées. Les projets mis sur pied au cours de cette fin de semaine: échange entre deux groupes, documents vidéo sur les changements observés durant l'apprentissage; comprendre l'apprentissage en groupe; s'inscrire à un cours et y assister (projet de recherche et de publicité); écrire une histoire; production, à l'intention des organismes, d'une trousse d'enquête sur ce qu'est l'alphabétisme.

Comme on pouvait s'y attendre, de nombreux éléments positifs (attendus ou non) se sont dégagés de ces ateliers, et nous avons également appris beaucoup de nos erreurs.

Il était important que les gens forment de petits groupes, qu'ils ne se présentent pas seuls. La meilleure formule semblait être l'équipe de deux ou trois élèves, auxquels se joignait un tuteur qu'ils connaissaient bien. Cette formule permettait aux gens de se préparer ensemble pour les ateliers et, souvent, de continuer à travailler ensemble. Elle permettait aussi d'être sûr que tous les élèves s'entraidaient et qu'ils recevaient l'appui du tuteur tout au long de la fin de semaine. Nous avons davantage pris conscience de ce besoin d'aide au fur et à mesure de nos rencontres. Idéalement, la planification en vue de l'atelier devrait se faire avec la coopération de tous les participants au séminaire, sans exception, mais cela est difficilement réalisable en raison de leur dispersion dans tout le pays. Le principe des petits groupes présentant chacun leurs points de vue et leurs plans constitue un premier pas vers l'organisation collective. Cela laisse

toutefois beaucoup de responsabilités et de travail de planification entre les mains d'un petit groupe de personnes.

Les gens se sont présentés aux ateliers avec des attentes différentes qui, souvent, n'étaient pas bien définies. Dans de tels cas, on doit déterminer le plus tôt possible ce que les gens comptent retirer des ateliers afin d'écarter toute confusion. Tout d'abord, on doit faire connaissance afin que l'atmosphère soit plus détendue pendant les situations d'apprentissage. Pour ce faire, il faut trouver des moyens pour briser la glace, par exemple en proposant des jeux dès la première séance. En fait, cela doit se faire dès l'arrivée des participants. Il convient de s'entendre dès le départ sur certaines règles de base qui permettront aux participants d'offrir de l'aide ou d'en demander au besoin. À Bradford, nous avons établi les règles suivantes:

1) Désigner un «guetteur de mots» (c'est-à-dire quelqu'un qui est chargé de demander des explications sur les mots difficiles, les termes spécialisés et les abréviations);

2) Désigner un secrétaire pour prendre les notes;

3) Veiller à ce que tous les textes soient lus à voix haute;

4) Veiller à ce que toute personne qui désire s'exprimer puisse le faire;

5) S'assurer que chacun assimile bien tout ce qui se dit;

6) Veiller à ce que ceux qui ont des difficultés à écrire puissent être aidés.

Finalement, un atelier efficace doit posséder une structure souple et laisser suffisamment de temps aux participants pour assimiler la matière. Bien qu'il soit important de planifier les séances à l'avance et que ceux qui les organisent soient bien préparés, il est également nécessaire de pouvoir faire face aux imprévus. Certains besoins se font jour uniquement au cours de la fin de semaine. On doit donc être en mesure d'y répondre en réorganisant le calendrier pour tenir compte de nouvelles activités. Pour la première fois à Bradford, nous avons accueilli un groupe de l'étranger, soit d'Allemagne. Au début, nous nous sommes inquiétés de la façon dont les choses se dérouleraient, particulièrement pour la traduction. Nous nous sommes vite aperçus que la présence de ce groupe constituait un atout. Nous avons tous bénéficié de la traduction, car nous devions nous efforcer de nous exprimer clairement et de ralentir le rythme pour permettre à chacun de vérifier auprès des autres s'il avait compris les activités de la même façon.

LA RECHERCHE DÉCOULANT DE L'APPRENTISSAGE DE L'ÉCRITURE

Voici un type très différent d'activité, au cours duquel un chercheur travaille avec les apprenants à un projet de petite envergure. Roz Ivanic décrit ici deux exemples de travaux effectués de cette façon, avec des gens qui apprenaient à écrire au Lancaster College of Adult Education. Dans chacun des cas, la recherche s'est faite dans le cadre d'un enseignement individuel de sorte qu'elle s'adaptait naturellement aux activités ordinaires du programme.

Recherche sur la ponctuation

« Au cours de ces travaux de recherche, j'ai discuté avec dix personnes qui apprenaient à écrire des brouillons des textes qu'elles rédigeaient pour le journal du collège. Dans un cours ordinaire, nous n'aurions sans doute pas examiné chacun des points et chacune des virgules qui ponctuaient le texte, ou même tous les endroits où la ponctuation avait été omise. C'est pourtant ce que nous avons fait, étant donné que c'était une recherche. C'est pour cette raison d'ailleurs que les apprenants n'ont pas pris mes remarques sur leur façon de ponctuer le texte comme des corrections ou des critiques négatives. Au contraire, nous avons tous abordé la question avec curiosité, en nous demandant pourquoi les points et les virgules avaient une place bien établie et pour quelles raisons ils avaient été placés à tel ou tel endroit. Les apprenants ont profité de tous les avantages qu'ils auraient pu tirer d'un cours individuel, et ils en ont appris davantage sur les règles de ponctuation grâce à nos discussions.

« Nous avons enregistré les discussions. J'ai ensuite écouté les bandes pour prendre note des explications de chacun concernant son choix d'utiliser le point ou la virgule. J'ai divisé les méthodes de ponctuation en quatre catégories: la « ponctuation en fonction de la quantité », la « ponctuation au son », la « ponctuation en fonction du sens » et la « ponctuation en fonction de la structure ». J'ai alors compilé le nombre de fois où l'on avait utilisé, à tort ou à raison, l'une de ces méthodes de ponctuation. J'ai pu constater, par exemple, que la méthode de ponctuation fonctionnait mieux pour les virgules que pour les points.

« J'ai consigné les résultats de deux façons. D'une part, j'ai rédigé un court article dans le journal du collège pour informer les élèves et les tuteurs de nos découvertes, afin de les aider dans leurs travaux ultérieurs. D'autre part, j'ai publié un article plus exhaustif, axé sur la linguistique » (Ivanic, 1988).

Recherche sur les problèmes d'identité en rapport avec l'écriture conventionnelle

« Cette recherche est le fruit de mon travail à titre de bénévole pour le collège, d'abord avec la collaboration de M. John Simpson, puis avec celle de M^me^ Denise Roach. Tous deux sont des jeunes qui ont abandonné l'école avant d'avoir obtenu leur diplôme et qui y sont retournés une fois dans la vingtaine. Dans les deux cas, nous avons transformé les séances d'enseignement en séances de recherche. La différence entre la recherche et l'enseignement est très subtile. En enseignement, je leur suggérais des méthodes pour améliorer leur écriture; en recherche, nous discutions de leur façon d'écrire, des aspects qui la différenciaient de l'écriture conventionnelle et de ce qu'ils envisageaient de faire à ce sujet. Plutôt que de toujours parler des façons correctes d'écrire, Denise et John trouvaient de bonnes raisons pour laisser leur texte tel quel. À la suite de nos discussions, ils avaient souvent gagné suffisamment d'assurance pour défendre leur propre façon d'écrire. Je crois que la principale différence résidait dans notre relation. En enseignement, j'étais « celui qui sait », le tuteur, l'enseignant. En recherche, nous formions une équipe de chercheurs, chacun apportant des idées différentes sur le problème auquel il faisait face. Il semblait qu'en transformant l'enseignement en recherche, nous appliquions deux principes fondamentaux de l'éducation de base: maintenir l'égalité entre adultes et donner des pouvoirs aux apprenants. John et Denise affirmaient tout de même en avoir appris longuement sur l'écriture au cours de ces séances, bien que l'accent n'ait pas été mis sur l'apprentissage; c'est donc dire qu'ils n'ont pas eu le sentiment de consacrer du temps à la recherche, à mon seul avantage.

« John et moi avons travaillé de cette façon pendant deux ans. Nous avons alors pensé qu'il serait peut-être bon de mettre nos observations sur papier, en équipe. Nous avons intitulé notre premier travail « Clearing Away the Debris: Learning and Researching Academic Writing ». Nous avons composé le titre comme nous avons rédigé le reste du texte: nous avons écrit chacun une version du texte avant d'en faire un collage. « Clearing Away the Debris » était l'idée que se faisait John de notre méthode commune de travail; « Learning and Researching Academic Writing » correspondait à ma description, plus aride, de ce que j'estimais que nous faisions. Le texte est paru dans le Rapal Bulletin *(1988). Depuis lors, nous avons rédigé un article beaucoup plus long destiné à un ouvrage (Ivanic et Simpson, 1991). Entre-temps, Denise et moi avions commencé à travailler ensemble et à mettre, en commun, nos idées sur papier (Ivanic et Roach, 1990). Nous jugeons qu'il est particulièrement important d'écrire dans un style intelligible aux autres élèves ainsi qu'aux tuteurs. Sur ce point, John et Denise ont constamment l'œil sur mon écriture!*

« La recherche doit découler naturellement des situations d'enseignement et d'apprentissage individuels. Il arrive souvent que les élèves

discutent d'un texte avec le tuteur afin de trouver des moyens de l'améliorer. En consignant ces discussions sur papier, ils peuvent recueillir des données susceptibles d'intéresser quelqu'un, en d'autres mots, de faire avancer la recherche.»

APPORTER DES CHANGEMENTS OU COMMENT LIER LA RECHERCHE ET LA PRATIQUE

Paulo Freire a bien montré en quoi l'alphabétisation est une forme de pouvoir. Lorsque celle-ci est imposée en fonction de buts extérieurs aux personnes, elle les rend «esclaves», alors que l'alphabétisation qui émane du désir qu'éprouvent les gens de communiquer et d'exercer une action sur leur milieu donne du pouvoir. On peut affirmer la même chose au sujet de la recherche: elle n'est pas neutre, mais sert toujours certains intérêts. Notre travail consiste à veiller à ce que la recherche en alphabétisation serve les fins des apprenants. Par conséquent, le principe fondamental de cette démarche, s'il y en a un, est de «partager le pouvoir».

Parmi les thèmes communs aux activités énumérées dans le présent texte, on note ceux-ci: prendre la parole et briser le silence — faire en sorte que se répandent les idées et les expériences laissées à l'écart par la recherche traditionnelle. Notre conception de la recherche implique aussi ses résultats. La réflexion et la découverte doivent être étroitement liées à l'action. Souvent, nous mettons l'accent sur la recherche de solutions. Par conséquent, au sein des groupes d'apprenants, nous insistons sur le fait que lorsque nous enseignons et nous apprenons, cela constitue une forme de recherche, et que diviser les activités en domaines distincts n'a aucun sens.

Comment peut-on partager notre «pouvoir», donner une voix aux apprenants et lier la réflexion et l'action? Voici les grandes étapes pratiques que nous avons jugées indispensables pour établir des liens entre la recherche et la pratique.

Les apprenants fixent les objectifs de la recherche

Voici un point déterminant, ardu, et de tous les points, probablement celui dont les répercussions auront la plus grande portée. Grâce à nos séminaires sur la recherche, nous avons trouvé un moyen de réaliser cet objectif. Nous devons inventer une nouvelle forme de séminaire et créer une espèce de tribune où les gens peuvent se rencontrer et échanger véritablement leurs connaissances. Cela signifie que chercheurs, enseignants et apprenants discutent entre eux, se donnent l'occasion de réfléchir sur leurs expériences, similaires ou différentes, et qu'ensemble, ils fixent des objectifs et déterminent quels sont les problèmes. Le financement est un élément important pour assurer la participation de tous. Il a fallu, pour les deux séminaires sur la recherche, trouver des fonds pour payer les frais de déplacement, le logement et les repas des apprenants.

Les apprenants participent aux décisions et ne sont pas uniquement les objets de la recherche

Cela signifie qu'il faut s'entendre sur un cadre de travail, décider de la méthode de recherche à employer et prendre part à toutes les étapes: collecte et consignation des données, interprétation des résultats et intervention au moment de la rédaction des textes. Cela veut dire également qu'on discute librement de l'objet de la recherche et de son fondement.

Cette recherche participative produit d'importants résultats, qui la situent au-dessus de la recherche traditionnelle.

Premièrement, les apprenants pensent qu'effectuer des recherches sur leur propre apprentissage les aide à comprendre leur démarche et à mieux apprendre par la suite. De cette façon, la recherche alimente la pratique.

Deuxièmement, les apprenants ont un droit de regard sur les techniques de recherche utilisées: il est très valorisant de savoir mener des entrevues, concevoir des questionnaires et rédiger un rapport de manière à convaincre d'autres personnes.

Troisièmement, étant donné que les apprenants sont engagés dans le processus de recherche, on tient davantage compte de leurs idées, de leurs commentaires, de leurs points de vue et de leurs perceptions que s'ils étaient de simples sujets d'étude. Par conséquent, les résultats de la recherche sont plus riches. Nous avons tenté de bien illustrer cela dans l'exemple donné de la recherche sur la ponctuation.

Finalement, par la recherche participative, on s'assure que diverses sources d'information sont utilisées, et qu'on accorde à toutes la même place. Cette façon de faire se fonde sur le principe selon lequel les expériences de première main constituent des sources valables d'information et un complément essentiel aux sources d'information et aux points de vue extérieurs.

Les apprenants et les chercheurs collaborent à la rédaction des résultats de leur recherche

Nous avons présenté un exemple de ce genre de travail dans la recherche sur le problème d'identité que vivent les adultes lorsqu'ils recommencent une formation. La rédaction collective n'est pas une tâche facile, mais elle en vaut la peine. Tout en constituant une application du principe voulant que tous puissent bénéficier également de leur participation à la recherche, cette expérience peut être enrichissante sur bien des plans.

Tout d'abord, la plupart des chercheurs n'ont plus à se demander s'ils ont bien exprimé le point de vue des «sujets». Dans la rédaction collective, les «sujets» ont un droit de regard sur ce qui se dit à leur propos. Ils peuvent ainsi s'assurer que personne ne dévoile une partie de leur vie privée ni ne présente leurs idées de façon erronée.

De plus, tous les participants apprennent beaucoup sur l'écriture au cours du processus. En partageant l'expérience avec une personne plus qualifiée, l'apprenant assimile des notions d'écriture qu'il n'apprendrait jamais par les méthodes traditionnelles. Le chercheur, prisonnier d'un style d'écriture conventionnel, découvre de nouvelles façons de s'exprimer, qui seront plus accessibles aux autres. Cela signifie qu'il adopte un style plus proche de la langue parlée dans ses textes, en employant diverses techniques, et qu'il colore ses phrases de métaphores vivantes plutôt que de fournir des explications truffées de termes arides et abstraits.

Cette façon de faire permet également de résoudre le problème de la place qui doit être réservée aux sources. Dans les recherches traditionnelles, on remercie sincèrement les personnes interrogées, dans l'introduction du rapport, et on s'empresse de les faire disparaître sous un pseudonyme dans le rapport même. Le rapport traite d'apprenants adultes en alphabétisation, mais il n'est pas écrit par eux. De ce fait, c'est le chercheur qui accède au titre d'expert en alphabétisation, et non les apprenants. Afin de prévenir ce genre de situation, on peut s'assurer que le nom des apprenants figure dans les articles et dans les rapports qui traitent d'eux, auprès de celui des formateurs et des chercheurs. Afin d'attribuer le mérite à ceux à qui il revient, on peut également veiller à ce que tous ceux qui ont participé à la recherche prennent part au travail de rédaction et aux conférences qui font état des résultats de la recherche. En effet, les personnes qui vivent concrètement la situation d'analphabétisme et d'alphabétisation sont celles à qui revient le mérite de faire avancer la connaissance sur ce sujet.

CONCLUSION

La recherche participative et l'action qui en résulte constituent le modèle le plus approprié pour le travail d'alphabétisation, en raison de la philosophie qui y sous-tend la formation et parce que s'alphabétiser, c'est se donner les moyens de connaître («lire pour comprendre le monde», pour reprendre les paroles de Freire), élever la voix quand on s'est toujours tu (écrire ce que l'on est) et communiquer aux autres ce que l'on a appris (atteindre un public).

Le groupe Rapal a été créé en réponse à ces besoins, mais jusqu'à maintenant, il n'a fait qu'amorcer l'exploration des pistes menant à la réalisation des objectifs. Il est important pour nous de créer des liens avec

ceux qui travaillent dans la même direction. Nous espérons que le présent article sensibilisera certaines personnes aux possibilités de recherches futures en alphabétisation et nous les convions à joindre leurs forces aux nôtres afin de provoquer le changement.

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Le groupe Rapal est établi au Bolton Royd Centre, Manningham Lane, Bradford BD8 7BB. Le bulletin de l'organisme paraît trois fois l'an, et il est possible de commander les numéros déjà parus.

ALPHABÉTISATION ET DÉVELOPPEMENT COMMUNAUTAIRE DANS UN QUARTIER D'HABITATION POPULAIRE*

Madalena Dias
Matosinhos, Portugal

* Traduit du portugais

Ce texte a pour but de mettre en lumière les stratégies mises au point dans le cadre d'un cours d'alphabétisation dans un contexte de développement communautaire, et les mouvements socioculturels qui en ont résulté. Ces stratégies reposent sur un principe fondamental, à savoir le constructivisme social étayé par des pratiques éducatives intégrées dans des modèles de conscientisation du processus d'identification socioculturelle.

L'esprit qui sous-tend la conception et la mise en œuvre de l'action socio-éducative, axé sur la culture, fait de cette action non pas simplement la tâche d'un organisme, mais un programme cohérent qui fait intervenir diverses valeurs sociales, qui interpelle et responsabilise l'ensemble de la communauté.

L'alphabétisation est donc un processus social complexe qui s'inscrit dans le développement de la communauté en ce sens qu'il empêche la propagation de l'analphabétisme, lequel est un facteur social qui fait obstacle au véritable exercice des droits civiques.

Le travail réalisé ainsi que les résultats obtenus ne furent possibles que grâce à la synergie qui s'est dégagée dans le prolongement d'une action qui articulait, liait et faisait converger personnes et organismes dans la conquête d'un espace de solidarité sociale.

LE CONTEXTE SOCIAL

L'expérience a commencé en octobre 1988 dans une zone résidentielle du nom de Biquinha, en banlieue de la ville de Matosinhos. La ville abrite une commune de la région nord du Portugal, insérée dans la zone métropolitaine de Porto, dont la population est de 1,2 million d'habitants.

À partir des années 1950, une forte migration allant de l'arrière-pays vers le littoral a entraîné une grande expansion de la commune, ce qui a créé des problèmes de logement et abouti à l'aménagement de quartiers de logements sociaux.

Au Portugal, le relogement des groupes sociaux économiquement faibles, quand il a lieu, se fait dans ce type de quartiers, selon des critères fondés sur le type de logement, la composition de la famille et ses revenus.

Ni les relations de famille ou de voisinage ni la vie communautaire n'entrent en ligne de compte, ce qui favorise la ségrégation sociale.

La situation matérielle

La zone résidentielle de Biquinha se compose de deux quartiers de HLM, appartenant à des organismes différents, qui ont été aménagés en deux phases, 1973 et 1979, et qui sont communément appelés *bairro velho* (vieux quartier) et *bairro novo* (nouveau quartier). Autour de ces terrains se trouvent de nombreuses baraques, dont quelques-unes sont habitées par des gitans, ainsi qu'un quartier de maisons unifamiliales dont les résidents sont appelés *queques rafeiros*[1].

Dans les deux quartiers, qui réunissent au total 544 logements dans des bâtiments de 3 à 5 étages, dont le sous-sol est également utilisé pour le logement, vivent environ 2 800 personnes, contre 2 400 dans les baraques. À l'heure actuelle s'achève l'aménagement d'un troisième quartier de HLM et un quatrième est prévu pour la fin de 1992. Ces quartiers sont situés dans les environs et ils compteront respectivement 118 et 45 logements. Il est prévu que la population des quatre quartiers de HLM atteindra environ 3 500 personnes.

Cette zone est considérée comme l'une des plus détériorées de la commune, et dans le nouveau quartier en particulier, tous les facteurs qui peuvent entraîner la dégradation de la situation socio-économique et culturelle sont réunis.

La majorité des résidents ne sont pas originaires de la commune. Ils vivaient auparavant dans des habitations précaires (îlots, baraques, mansardes, garages). Ce sont principalement des familles nombreuses, qui généralement cohabitent dans un espace exigu, et des familles monoparentales.

La population est essentiellement sous-scolarisée[2] et on constate un taux élevé d'échecs et d'abandons scolaires. Les bas salaires, les faibles qualifications professionnelles et les problèmes de sous-emploi caractérisent les rapports de cette population avec le monde du travail. Les familles sont économiquement faibles[3] et la moitié seulement des résidents en âge de travailler exercent une activité professionnelle. Les autres sont des femmes au foyer, des sans-emploi ou des jeunes à la recherche d'un premier emploi. Les hommes sont, pour la plupart, ouvriers du bâtiment et métallurgistes, tandis que les femmes travaillent surtout dans le textile et les conserveries.

Un résident a raconté ce qui suit: «J'en avais marre d'être en deuxième classe, je savais que j'allais être collé: j'ai toujours fait partie des cancres, je ne voulais rien savoir des livres. Je suis allé demander un

emploi dans un chantier de construction. Quand j'ai dit que j'habitais à Biquinha, le contremaître s'est mis à rire et m'a mis à la porte. J'ai recommencé, mais cette fois j'ai menti: j'ai donné l'adresse de ma grand-mère. Quelques jours plus tard, on a découvert la vérité. On m'a congédié.»

La dégradation de l'espace physique achevait le tableau: l'éclairage public insuffisant, le mauvais état des lieux et les traces de vandalisme dans les bâtiments, l'absence d'espace vert et les ordures envahissantes formaient un cadre de vie qu'il fallait absolument changer.

Les rapports sociaux et les valeurs

La vie quotidienne des résidents se caractérise par des rapports de voisinage conflictuels, faute d'enracinement, où les règles de civisme ne sont aucunement respectées. Les espaces communs sont prétexte aux querelles et au vandalisme: le parc pour enfants fut complètement détruit par les adultes, les entrées des deux bâtiments sont en ruine et il n'y existe aucune hygiène collective. Les enfants eux-mêmes sont à l'origine de disputes qui souvent se terminent à l'hôpital.

Les résidents d'origine gitane sont l'exception. Ils ne se mêlent pas des disputes entre voisins, ils manifestent une grande cohésion familiale et ont le respect des autres résidents. D'ailleurs, pour résoudre les problèmes de sécurité, on a retenu les services de vigiles gitans.

L'alcool, la drogue et la prostitution prolifèrent, frappant indifféremment enfants, adolescents et adultes.

Les structures familiales sont fortement ébranlées, très fragilisées, ce qui débouche sur des conflits familiaux de tous genres, et l'agression physique au sein des familles est courante.

Les parents exploitent, sans scrupule aucun, leurs propres enfants. Ainsi, lorsqu'un enfant naît, la fille aînée, toujours en très bas âge d'ailleurs, abandonne souvent ses activités extérieures (l'école ou le travail) pour prendre soin du nouveau-né. Il en va de même lorsque la mère trouve du travail. Les jeunes, qui très tôt, dès l'âge de 12 ou 14 ans, sont lancés dans le dur monde du travail, ne participent pas à la gestion de leurs maigres revenus: ils ne travaillent que pour procurer de l'argent à leur famille. L'exploitation des enfants prend diverses formes, qui vont jusqu'à la mendicité et la prostitution.

La vie spirituelle reflète le désordre de ce mode de vie. Les religions et sectes installées dans le quartier sont nombreuses, mais elles constituent une certaine ligne de force qui stabilise les tendances: elles cohabitent donc dans le respect l'une de l'autre. Les croyants sont ceux qui déstabilisent le moins et ceux qui recherchent une vie familiale harmonieuse.

Alors que pour les uns, c'est la religion, pour les autres, c'est le magnétoscope et le téléviseur qui donnent un certain prestige social. On aime regarder les feuilletons télévisés et les films à sensations fortes, de préférence les westerns, les films de guerre et les films pornographiques.

Le sport intéresse adolescents et adultes, qui pratiquent diverses activités, notamment l'athlétisme et le football, où ils sont le plus habiles.

Les équipements collectifs et les infrastructures sociales

Le quartier a:

— une école primaire, fréquentée par environ 300 élèves, où il y a depuis janvier 1988 une cantine;

— une minicrèche, qui a ouvert ses portes en 1988 et qui accueille les enfants âgés de trois mois à trois ans, mais qui ne comble que la moitié des besoins;

— deux associations locales, l'une inactive, et l'autre, appelée Centre populaire des travailleurs du quartier de Biquinha (CPTQB), qui organise des activités sportives dans la salle des sports (dont l'administration lui fut confiée en décembre 1988) et qui a son propre siège où elle exploite un petit café;

— un pavillon polyvalent ouvert à diverses activités à caractère socio-éducatif et culturel, inauguré en décembre 1989 et administré par le CPTQB.

Le quartier ne dispose d'aucun établissement commercial.

La commune, forte de sa croissance économique et soucieuse de son image de progrès démocratique et social, ne pouvait plus supporter dans l'indifférence les effets pervers de son rapide développement.

Elle avait certes réagi favorablement en s'employant à résoudre de manière plus ou moins concertée les problèmes que posait le logement, mais elle ne pouvait pas faire fi des graves problèmes sociaux qui apparaissaient dans les quartiers de HLM.

LE PROJET D'ACTION COMMUNAUTAIRE

La naissance du projet

La communauté locale dénonçait, chaque fois avec plus d'inquiétude, la situation qu'elle vivait et qui se traduisait par la rupture des rapports quotidiens, et, souvent, elle mettait en cause l'espèce d'agression que constituait le nouveau milieu de vie. Quand les résidents s'adressaient aux autorités, ils se défoulaient en disant: «On nous plaque ici et après on nous

ignore.» Certains, ceux qui éprouvaient le plus de difficulté à s'intégrer, passaient la journée dans une baraque non loin — qu'ils avaient gardée —, avec un petit jardin et un cyclomoteur.

Les résidents se tournaient vers les divers organismes sociaux pour résoudre leurs problèmes quotidiens, pour se donner de nouvelles perspectives d'avenir. Ils cherchaient surtout des solutions à leurs nombreuses dettes, aux frais du loyer, et souvent ils souhaitaient simplement dire ce qu'ils avaient sur le cœur.

Les enseignants de l'école primaire ont alerté les autorités locales sur le fait que les enfants souffraient de la faim, qu'ils s'évanouissaient souvent pendant les activités scolaires et devaient parfois être soignés à l'hôpital de Matosinhos pour dénutrition. La situation étant pressante, la municipalité de Matosinhos, le Centre régional de sécurité sociale et la paroisse d'Aldoar ont alors conclu un accord spécial prévoyant l'aménagement d'une cantine scolaire. Les enfants étaient victimes d'un manque total d'hygiène personnelle et du manque d'hygiène collective. De plus, beaucoup éprouvaient de graves difficultés d'apprentissage.

Un processus était enclenché, où dès le début on s'est interrogé sur l'insuffisance de l'assistance et des moyens pratiques utilisés pour régler les problèmes en cause. Les spécialistes ont vite compris, sur le terrain, que l'approche adoptée était peu fructueuse, qu'elle aggravait la situation de dépendance. Ils se sont donc employés à substituer au modèle linéaire habituel un modèle dialectique, complexe, articulé autour d'un réseau de communication, où tous collaboraient, de manière embryonnaire, à changer les mentalités.

En mars 1988, la municipalité de Matosinhos a réuni les représentants des résidents du quartier et des divers organismes qui jusque-là agissaient de manière désarticulée, pour conjuguer les efforts et mettre sur pied une équipe pluridisciplinaire chargée de favoriser la participation active de la communauté à la revitalisation sociale. Ensemble, résidents, élus et spécialistes ont conclu, dans le cadre d'une réunion élargie, un pacte social de solidarité, auquel tous ont adhéré, ressentant désormais le besoin de «se donner la main» pour dynamiser un réseau interactif de rapports qui faciliterait et renforcerait le cohésion des buts. Ce fut la naissance du Projet intégré du quartier de Biquinha.

Après une étude fouillée visant à caractériser la population du quartier, une nouvelle réunion fut tenue en mai 1988: on y a souligné la nécessité de changer les mentalités pour que cesse l'attitude de rejet dont souffraient les gens du quartier. Les acteurs étaient tous ceux qui se réunissaient autour du tapis vert, face à face, s'interrogeant, réfléchissant à leur attitude, souhaitant ouverture et concertation dans les stratégies d'action.

Les grands objectifs du projet furent définis:

— Juguler la dégradation des conditions de vie des résidents;

— Voir à favoriser la participation et l'organisation des résidents, en vue de leur valorisation individuelle et collective.

Les partenaires sociaux se firent plus nombreux: environ une quinzaine, représentant les services de santé, la sécurité sociale, le monde du travail, la réintégration sociale et l'éducation. Pour ceux qui travaillaient déjà dans le milieu, il fallait redéfinir l'approche à l'égard de la communauté; pour les autres, il importait de lancer des stratégies d'action sur le terrain. Nous, de l'éducation permanente, figurions parmi ces derniers. Ainsi s'est aménagé un mécanisme de fonctionnement du projet qui liait les partenaires sociaux entre eux en les faisant participer à des réunions élargies et qui, par l'articulation avec les organismes, s'inscrivait dans une double perspective: verticale d'abord, dans le sens de la hiérarchie propre à l'organisme, en sensibilisant et en mobilisant les ressources, horizontale ensuite, en mettant sur pied une équipe pluridisciplinaire chargée de dynamiser et de mettre en œuvre des stratégies d'intérêt local. Les adhésions au projet étaient volontaires.

Les réunions élargies ont abouti, avec la persistance des actions dans le milieu, à la formation d'un groupe de direction se composant de quatre personnes: deux spécialistes des services sociaux (l'une attachée à la municipalité de Matosinhos et l'autre au Centre régional de sécurité sociale) et deux professeurs (la directrice de l'école primaire et la responsable de l'éducation permanente). Ce groupe, qui avait des fonctions administratives, devait mettre en œuvre une stratégie globale de promotion socio-économique et culturelle des divers groupes, et ce dans une perspective multidimensionnelle. La municipalité de Matosinhos coordonnait les actions et finançait le projet tandis que les autres services mobilisaient essentiellement des ressources humaines.

Premières actions et premiers résultats

En juin 1988, l'année scolaire touchait à sa fin et l'école primaire s'employait à adapter ses programmes pédagogiques à la réalité. Mais les tentatives faites pour organiser des réunions avec les parents d'élèves échouèrent, pour deux raisons: le manque de participation et la diversité des objectifs poursuivis. La discorde éclata et il y eut des récriminations de part et d'autre.

Pour diffuser une méthode privilégiant la participation, nous avons préparé une première action commune, en comptant sur l'effet catalyseur du mouvement associatif local et sur la volonté de l'école de rayonner au-delà de ses frontières.

En s'inspirant du thème: «les ordures», les enfants ont fait divers travaux qui ont été exposés dans la salle polyvalente. Un après-midi, nous avons organisé un colloque-débat sur ce thème, qui proposait l'ouverture sur la communauté, avec la participation du responsable municipal des travaux publics et du nettoiement et des techniciens du domaine.

Le CPTQB et la population scolaire formaient le réseau de diffusion. C'étaient des hommes, des femmes et des enfants qui venaient à l'école, curieux d'essayer de nouvelles approches pour résoudre leurs problèmes.

Nous avons organisé un diaporama, que nous avions produit, sur le thème «les ordures». Le matériel audiovisuel suscitait la polémique, mettant en cause l'action de la municipalité sur cette question.

Les résidents ont réagi dans le même sens, exposant par analogie leurs problèmes: ils se sont mis à raconter des incidents où des voisins «se servent des baignoires pour saler les sardines, après quoi ils puent le poisson pourri», «amènent des ânes à la maison et les montrent même à la fenêtre», et ils terminaient en disant que «le problème, c'est que s'il y avait seulement un malpropre par immeuble, il s'habituerait à être propre comme les autres, mais il y a quatre malpropres contre deux personnes propres».

Les résidents accusaient les autorités municipales surtout, à cause de leur façon de procéder pour le nettoiement du quartier, tandis que les représentants invités cherchaient à modérer l'agressivité de ceux qui prenaient la parole.

Les uns et les autres ont endossé leurs responsabilités et ont proposé de changer les mentalités: la municipalité s'est engagée à envoyer une équipe de travailleurs chargée de nettoyer le quartier et à augmenter le nombre de poubelles, tandis que les résidents se sont engagés à collaborer à la campagne de propreté et à respecter les décharges. Ils ont regardé attentivement les travaux faits par les élèves. Quelque chose de nouveau commençait à se produire, semblait-il.

Cette première activité nous a permis de constater la capacité d'action et la réaction des résidents face à un défi qui touchait un problème quotidien propre à leur quartier. Les résultats concrets furent immédiats, tangibles et visibles. Les résidents pouvaient surveiller les activités de nettoiement et y participer, ils pouvaient aisément faire le lien avec les événements qui se produisaient, et les changements étaient perceptibles.

Pour nous, l'étape suivante consisterait à lancer des stratégies participatives aboutissant à un projet sur les besoins éducatifs.

Les résidents s'ouvraient peu à peu à la participation, ils avaient une attitude polémique, ils commençaient à sentir que l'école était un espace

à eux et ils parlaient facilement de «leurs» problèmes au lieu de toujours les attribuer aux voisins.

ALPHABÉTISATION ET DÉVELOPPEMENT

De notre modèle de développement intégré...

Notre participation à ce projet comportait quelques attentes, notamment parce que nous nous proposions de travailler au sein de la communauté, dans une action éducative d'alphabétisation, qui s'articulait avec le socioculturel et le socio-éducatif. Le développement aurait pour toile de fond la communauté, et le programme visait à l'acquisition progressive de capacités d'action sur soi-même.

Au cours de la première phase d'intégration dans le groupe de travail dont nous faisions partie avec divers organismes et représentants des résidents, dans les réunions élargies et dans le groupe de direction, nous avons tenté, de manière informelle, de renforcer le concept d'alphabétisation (qui pour la majorité se réduisait à l'enseignement de la lecture, de l'écriture et de l'arithmétique) dans le sens d'une «action culturelle dialogique». Les pratiques, les modalités et l'action éducative avec les résidents se sont concrétisées par des travaux visant à éclaircir leurs conditions de vie, l'apprentissage social étant une tâche commune, interpénétrée par la construction de compétences entre formateurs et apprenants, d'égal à égal, qui consiste à créer des instruments individuels et collectifs de défense dans le respect des dimensions cognitives et affectives des individus[4].

Il importait de faire prendre conscience de l'action qui se doublait d'une réflexion: l'action devait stimuler en priorité la coresponsabilisation sociale, favoriser la création de réseaux de coopération au sein et à l'extérieur de la communauté, dans des espaces de solidarité permettant de rentabiliser les ressources communautaires existantes et de répondre à la diversité des besoins créés par la dynamique éducative locale.

Les résidents s'inscrivaient jusqu'alors dans un type d'action sociale qui n'exigeait d'eux qu'une faible participation dans le déroulement du processus et dans l'élaboration de buts à long terme: subventions pour le désendettement, révision des loyers, solutions à la malnutrition des enfants, etc. L'efficacité ponctuelle de cette attitude était dépassée et un nouveau cycle de dépendance s'instaurait.

Les rapports que les résidents entretenaient avec le monde extérieur ne stimulaient pas chez eux le développement d'un mode de vie conscient; au contraire, ils faisaient obstacle à la capacité d'action de chacun, en partie à cause de leur faible niveau d'études dans une situation économique défavorable.

Les résidents commençaient à aborder leurs problèmes sous des angles nouveaux, en cherchant à obtenir des résultats. Dans ce projet, la présence de l'éducation permanente était due bien plus à une appréciation clinique de la situation éducative, notamment de la sous-scolarisation chez les jeunes et les adultes, qu'à des revendications populaires qui auraient témoigné d'une prise de conscience de la part des gens quant à leur faible niveau d'instruction. Les groupes cibles étaient les jeunes qui avaient un très bas niveau d'études et qui étaient sans emploi ainsi que les femmes au foyer.

Notre action présupposait que la communauté puisse se mobiliser et prendre conscience du problème éducatif. Notre expérience montrait clairement l'inefficacité des actions ponctuelles d'alphabétisation, par rapport aux résultats des approches pluridisciplinaires dans le cadre d'initiatives de promotion socioculturelle et économique.

Le terrain social s'est construit avec le temps grâce à des initiatives locales visant un développement dynamisé par les personnes, groupes et organisations appartenant aux milieux sociaux visés.

Notre manière de comprendre et d'animer l'éducation des adultes se fondait sur l'ouverture et la mise en valeur des potentialités locales que représentaient les savoirs, les savoir-faire et le patrimoine symbolique, ainsi que sur le rôle des autorités et associations locales à titre d'interlocuteurs. Les principaux obstacles étaient notre grande mobilité en tant qu'agents éducatifs (instabilité consécutive à l'absence d'un cadre professionnel propre) qui insécurisait les gens, ainsi que le peu de moyens financiers. Aujourd'hui, nous avons la possibilité d'élaborer et de mettre en œuvre des programmes efficaces d'éducation de base qui articulent les volets formation générale et éducation technique et pratique avec des objectifs de développement intégré des capacités d'action individuelle dans le monde du travail et dans la société, et qui concourent au renouvellement des approches éducatives dans le cadre du développement local.

Nous avions conscience que nous devions innover, lancer une stratégie de compromis et d'adaptation, en créant des espaces de communication, d'interactivités, de connaissance de soi et des autres, en optimisant les ressources de chacun des sujets, protagonistes de l'action dans le sens de la construction d'une identité culturelle.

Nos compétences pratiques, définies par notre encadrement théorique et pratique, devaient s'adapter à la réalité qui s'offrait à nous.

... et de son application

Parmi les moyens dont nous disposions, certains étaient prometteurs, d'autres prêtaient à la controverse.

L'espace politique

Les autorités, qui parrainaient et dynamisaient le projet, créaient d'entrée de jeu un espace de formation politique pour les citoyens, en leur ouvrant des perspectives quant au problème du logement social et de la participation des bénéficiaires, les acteurs sociaux. Elles faisaient appel aux associations et organismes locaux. Elles finançaient et encourageaient la mobilisation de diverses sources de financement.

L'équipe pluridisciplinaire

Le groupe de direction, dont la composition a déjà été décrite, a permis de créer « interactivement » un climat de communauté éducative pour les divers secteurs, dans les conditions de la formation et du développement des aptitudes, dans un espace continu de pratiques de travail communautaire.

Nous avions des réunions hebdomadaires avec le CPTQB à son siège, pour planifier les programmes et approuver le déroulement des activités, pour réfléchir aux difficultés, optimiser les acquis et songer à des solutions de rechange. Toutes ces questions et d'autres encore, qui apparaissaient dans le quotidien, étaient traitées plus spécifiquement et plus techniquement dans le cadre d'une autre rencontre de travail hebdomadaire à la municipalité, où nous cherchions à exposer les données des problèmes cernés et à leur donner une perspective sociale, pour leur trouver une solution. Pour cette réflexion, nous faisions appel, chaque fois que la dynamique du travail l'exigeait, à des travailleurs d'autres organismes sociaux et souvent, pour être plus efficaces, nous allions à leur rencontre.

L'espace physique

Puisque c'était dans le quartier, au sens large, que nous menions notre action, il fallait songer à un local pour tenir les activités éducatives. Les choix étaient minces, pour ne pas dire inexistants. Le siège du CPTQB est exigu, ayant une surface de six mètres carrés, et ne présentait donc pas les conditions minimales pour un fonctionnement systématique et régulier. Ne restait que l'école primaire. D'une part, les taux d'abandons et d'échecs scolaires nous donnaient à penser que nous axerions notre action sur l'analphabétisme fonctionnel, entre autres. D'autre part, il y avait les jeunes, pénalisés par le système scolaire, que cette même école avait marginalisés. Sur le plan affectif, ils avaient donc une attitude négative face à ce cadre, qui pouvait d'entrée de jeu constituer un obstacle. Cependant, il y avait là une structure d'enseignement établie qui pouvait s'ouvrir au milieu et qu'il était urgent de conquérir.

La planification de l'action

En octobre 1988, nous en étions à l'étape de la planification de notre action. Jusque-là, nos contacts avec le quartier avaient été sporadiques. Nous avions partagé idées et objectifs avec le CPTQB et c'est presque dans l'anonymat que nous avions participé à la dynamisation de la première action commune. Dans notre parcours, nous soulevions des interrogations sur les méthodes employées en mettant à l'essai un projet sous le signe de l'ouverture, où nul ne savait ce qui se produirait. Nous avions la certitude toutefois que le travail communautaire aurait des répercussions sur le plan éducatif.

La première question que nous posions concernait les stades de développement du processus qui avait pour but la constitution d'un groupe communautaire en vue d'une action éducative. Après pondération de nos objectifs éducatifs et des objectifs généraux du projet, qui indiquaient une approche plurielle, et après réflexion sur les expériences qui avaient été faites, nous avons prévu les étapes suivantes:

— La motivation, faite surtout par des contacts réguliers et systématiques dans le quartier;

— La participation des résidents, qui, sur le plan pratique, cerneraient leurs besoins et problèmes;

— Le développement de l'autonomie par la formation de groupes qui seraient à la fois les cibles et les agents de la dynamisation des initiatives.

Ces étapes se concrétiseraient dans un cadre, que nous appelions «préalphabétisation», consistant à former un groupe cible en vue d'un cours d'alphabétisation.

L'itinéraire pluriel qui composait l'action globale prévoyait dans le même temps trois types d'actions:

— L'action éducative visant à l'acquisition de compétences intellectuelles et relationnelles;

— L'action socio-éducative ayant pour but l'insertion ou la réinsertion professionnelle;

— L'action socioculturelle, venant élargir, cristalliser et dynamiser les deux premières actions, en les articulant autour de la vie et de la culture du quartier, pour associer les résidents à la bonne gestion de la revitalisation du tissu social.

LA PLURALITÉ DES ORIENTATIONS

Le cadre de développement de l'action d'alphabétisation s'analyse dans le contexte des mouvements qui en sont à l'origine, la «préalphabétisation» et les mouvements qui en ont découlé, la «postalphabétisation». Si au cours de la première phase du projet le parcours a été marqué par cette séquence dynamique, il n'empêche qu'il s'est adapté par la suite aux nouveaux rythmes de la population visée. Les actions, ainsi que leurs sujets, qui s'inscrivaient dans le cadre de la préalphabétisation ou de la postalphabétisation, agissaient les unes sur les autres dans des espaces continus et communs, que je décrirai ci-après. Mais les activités peuvent provoquer aussi des mouvements différents chez les acteurs, qui expliquent leur progression dans l'espace éducatif. Cela se produit dans un cadre global où stratégies, applications et résultats forment le tissu permanent des actions.

La préalphabétisation

La communauté, avec ses inépuisables potentialités, assumée dans sa complexité réelle, est le présupposé théorique et pratique qui détermine le cours de l'action. La vie communautaire est ainsi assimilée à la faculté permanente d'influer sur soi et de se mobiliser en des processus qui stimulent la prise de conscience individuelle et collective, qui favorisent la création et la diffusion de réseaux de communication, lesquels amènent un changement réel dans les conditions de vie. Dans ce sens, il nous a semblé opportun d'asseoir le travail communautaire sur le mouvement associatif local, qui servirait d'interlocuteur et de catalyseur, et ce dans une approche pluridisciplinaire.

Dans une perspective sociale, j'ai fait les premières visites informelles dans le quartier en compagnie de l'assistante sociale de la municipalité de Matosinhos, qui contactait régulièrement les familles en faisant des visites à domicile. La plupart des visites concernaient des retards de loyer, des demandes de réduction et diverses autres questions qui à défaut d'être réglées risquaient d'entraîner l'expulsion du locataire. Généralement, nous étions reçus par la mère de famille, qui le plus souvent était sans profession, et parfois nous trouvions aussi des hommes, qui étaient en congé de maladie. Après les présentations, où on me faisait connaître comme «professeur pour adultes» (en expliquant qu'il s'agissait ici de personnes de plus de quatorze ans), les conversations se poursuivaient dans la même ligne; nous profitions des possibilités d'ouverture du dialogue (qui représentait un grand défi vu le grand besoin de communication qui se manifestait) et nous échangions nos impressions sur le cheminement dans les études, celui des enfants surtout.

Nous constations avec une certaine fréquence que la situation scolaire de la famille était régressive, c'est-à-dire que le niveau d'études des

enfants était inférieur à celui des parents. Ce fait n'était pas indifférent aux parents, qui s'excusaient tout en insistant: « Ils ne sont pas faits pour les études, ils n'ont jamais rien fait. Ils sont allés à l'école jusqu'à l'âge de 12, 13 ans, puis ils ont commencé à faire l'école buissonnière. Finalement, ils se mettent à travailler comme apprentis maçons ou alors dans les conserveries. Ils travaillent sans papiers, ils gagnent peu d'argent, mais le peu qu'ils rapportent donne à manger. Ils font le travail qu'ils trouvent, parce qu'ils n'ont pas de métier et n'ont même pas terminé leur quatrième année... »

Nos rapports avec ces gens se fondaient sur le respect de leur façon de voir la vie quotidienne. Peu à peu, nous lancions le défi de modifier la situation dont ils faisaient état. Il suffisait pour cela d'une volonté de changement. L'inquiétude s'installait et nous laissions ouverte la possibilité de reprendre la conversation, s'ils le désiraient, au siège du CPTQB où nous assurions une permanence. Celle-ci coïncidait avec les heures de grande affluence des résidants, qui venaient prendre le café, téléphoner, jouer aux cartes, regarder la télévision et bavarder. Il s'y trouvait toujours quelques membres du Centre qui avaient pris l'habitude de participer à notre permanence, y bâtissant jour après jour un lieu de rencontre où nous échangions des idées sur la vie du quartier.

Les difficultés que connaissaient les familles et qui étaient exposées là constituaient un problème collectif, souvent lié à la vie communautaire: il y avait les enfants qui jouaient au ballon au milieu de la rue et à l'entrée des bâtiments, provoquant ainsi des dégâts, qui à leur tour entraînaient des disputes entre les mères; il y avait la salle des sports, désormais verrouillée pour éviter sa dégradation, etc.

Le défi que représentait le changement sous-tendait cette observation des faits et l'action concrète, et mettait en évidence la nécessité de créer de nouvelles dynamiques associatives. La recherche commune de programmes innovateurs pour les jeunes a engendré un mouvement axé sur l'action et a abouti à la réalisation de trois projets cofinancés par l'Institut de la jeunesse. Les jeunes, à titres d'animateurs et de participants, essayaient et assumaient de nouvelles formes d'organisation.

Le mouvement était lancé et la population participait chaque fois davantage à ce carrefour, à la construction d'une matrice faisant intervenir besoins et intérêt éducatifs. Nous commencions à sentir que les rapports mûrissaient. Un jour, le gardien de la salle des sports locale, résident à la retraite membre du CPTQB, avec lequel nous avions des rapports assidus et qui en règle générale nous accompagnait, nous remit une liste portant la signature de 30 résidents désireux de suivre un cours d'alphabétisation, d'apprendre la couture et le tricot ou de s'initier à l'électricité. Nous avons cherché à mieux comprendre cette mobilisation: l'engagement avait mûri avec le temps, le groupe commençait à travailler dans un processus aboutissant à une plus grande identification relationnelle et situationnelle.

Dans le même temps, il fallait planifier les actions avec l'association: définir des objectifs précis, quantifier les frais financiers et recruter deux formateurs (au sein de la communauté dans la mesure du possible). Les limitations de l'espace physique furent prises en considération et nous avons tous convenu que l'école primaire était le seul endroit disponible. Si pour le cours d'alphabétisation cela ne faisait pas problème, la disponibilité étant immédiate, en revanche, pour les cours socio-éducatifs (couture, tricot et électricité) des incompatibilités se dessinaient, qui ont entraîné des chinoiseries administratives, lesquelles n'ont disparu qu'après qu'on eut exercé de grandes pressions.

C'était la fin de novembre 1988 et nous avions quatre groupes cibles prêts à essayer de nouveaux cadres de vie: nouvelles activités sportives, débordement du cadre du quartier, projets sportifs et culturels, initiatives de formation associative. Le nombre et l'assiduité des participants dépassaient nos attentes.

Le cadre de pensée a été élaboré et nous nous sommes rendu compte de la faible représentation des femmes au foyer dans nos groupes, dominés par les jeunes. Nous ne pouvions négliger leur importance comme groupe clé constituant un facteur d'équilibre entre les familles et la communauté, d'autant plus que leur formation et leurs réalisations personnelles étaient plus grandes. Le déroulement ultérieur des actions devait nous inciter à adopter de nouveaux indicateurs de participation.

L'alphabétisation

L'acte éducatif est ainsi une double émanation du groupe cible et de la communauté: il intègre les agents, les acteurs sociaux et communautaires ainsi que les partenaires sociaux. Il crée des modèles de participation de la population. La planification des diverses activités est participative, déclenchant la réalisation progressive des objectifs. L'action est dynamique, elle catalyse, elle est flexible et engendre de nouvelles situations d'apprentissage. Son déroulement se fait sur les plans cognitif, émotif et relationnel, encourageant l'estime de soi, stimulant et amorçant l'acquisition de compétences sociales, renforçant et autonomisant les capacités individuelles dans une perspective d'action sociale, déclenchant des mouvements de solidarité collective.

La dynamique de l'action inscrite dans les permanences régulières au siège du CPTQB a commencé à se prolonger par le fonctionnement régulier du cours d'alphabétisation à l'école, local qui peu à peu retenait l'attention de la population. Le cours d'alphabétisation réunissait près de 40 participants, le cours de tricot 26, le cours de couture 20 et le cours d'électricité 37. D'où le dédoublement des groupes pour permettre une meilleure interaction.

Dans les cours d'alphabétisation ou l'apprentissage d'un métier, les participants, dans leur majorité, privilégiaient la formation dans les domaines jugés les plus pratiques. Leurs motivations étaient très diverses: les uns souhaitaient obtenir le certificat du premier cycle et faire un apprentissage en rapport avec leurs besoins et les difficultés qu'ils connaissaient sur le plan professionnel, les autres désiraient se donner un espace social et beaucoup s'essayaient à de nouvelles relations. Les activités se déroulaient dans le cadre d'espaces communs que nous appelions «formation complémentaire», alternant avec les composantes spécifiques, et caractérisée par une approche particulière:

— La lecture, l'écriture et le calcul, conçus dans un exercice de compréhension critique, touchent et dynamisent les divers domaines, en venant stimuler et consolider, dans une relation de dépendance plus ou moins profonde, les objectifs précis qu'ils visent;

— Les passerelles entre le savoir «intellectuel» et le savoir «faire» (l'affiche qui annonce le match de football, la jupe confectionnée au cours de couture) dessinent les contours du savoir «être».

La formation complémentaire était un espace ouvert à la réalisation d'activités libres et créatives, rythmées par les événements du moment et étroitement liées aux activités associatives. Elle obéissait à une planification souple et naturelle et elle faisait appel à d'autres participants du milieu ou à des organismes. Il y a d'abord eu la préparation de la fête de Noël avec l'association, ce qui a amené la formation d'une chorale. Ensuite il y a eu des rencontres sportives qui ont donné lieu à un colloque avec débat sur l'alimentation des athlètes. Enfin, en mars 1989, nous avons tenu la première exposition des travaux réalisés, avec, dans le même temps, un programme de cinéma d'animation.

Les grands artisans de cette initiative furent les participants au cours d'alphabétisation, qui avaient pris en charge la coordination et la réalisation de la majorité des étapes. La population a participé massivement: elle s'est rendue à l'école, elle a observé, et elle a jeté un regard critique sur son cadre de vie. Par la suite, un journal a été créé qui contribua à la diffusion de l'information et constitua en quelque sorte un défi, dans la mesure où il comptait sur une plus grande participation dans les initiatives locales.

Ce contexte dynamique, qui faisait intervenir d'ores et déjà beaucoup de gens et qui était le produit de l'équipe pluridisciplinaire, a favorisé l'adhésion aux autres secteurs qui s'intégraient au projet. Ainsi est née l'idée de réaliser en juin 1988 un ensemble d'activités culturelles qui auraient pour point culminant l'exposition Expovida I, à laquelle toute la communauté devait participer. Cette initiative avait pour thème la propreté du quartier et elle avait pour motif la réfection des bâtiments. Il y eut un

concours de poésie, un défilé d'arcs décorés au son d'une musique de fanfare dans tout le quartier, l'exposition elle-même et une pièce de théâtre à l'école, un festival de folklore et de la musique dans la salle des sports bondée. Tout cela donnait un nouvel élan à la vie communautaire.

«Ce sont des moments qui restent précieux pendant une vie entière. Nous avons fait et découvert des choses dont nous n'avions jamais rêvé. Nous sommes même allés à Lisbonne et nous avons vu sur place ce que nous voyons d'habitude à la télévision. Ce fut une journée bien remplie. Nous avons donné une nouvelle vie à notre quartier, la direction du Centre pense davantage à nous et dans la salle des sports et à l'école, on ne cesse de travailler. Récemment, nous avons organisé une grande fête avec toutes les écoles: celle des tout-petits, celle des enfants et celle des adultes. À la fin, c'est tout le quartier qui participait à la vie de l'école.» C'est Sandra qui a écrit cela sur une affiche.

Ces mouvements socioculturels qui se concrétisaient en initiatives locales pour le développement ont enrichi et consolidé les réseaux de communication et de diffusion, internes et externes, en favorisant et en stimulant la recherche effective d'une éducation adaptée aux besoins. D'une part, c'était les participants eux-mêmes qui manifestaient la volonté de poursuivre leurs études en proposant la réalisation, pendant un été, de programmes professionnels avec l'appui du Fonds social européen, avec des volets de formation générale en matière d'hygiène et de sécurité au travail et d'insertion sociale et professionnelle. D'autre part, de nouveaux groupes se sont organisés et ont réfléchi à leurs besoins.

L'insuffisance de l'équipement social a conduit à la construction d'un bâtiment polyvalent, qui avait comme vocation d'être un espace culturel ouvert à la communauté et d'appuyer le développement de compétences sociales.

Seule une planification souple prenant en considération la mobilité des ressources humaines et financières et leur adaptation aux dynamiques de base qui se créaient a permis de réagir favorablement aux initiatives issues du contexte éducatif.

La postalphabétisation

La communauté a évolué et elle a mis à jour ses potentialités éducatives en s'organisant et en participant activement à la réalisation de ses objectifs. Elle a assimilé et adopté un nouveau modèle pour son quotidien, actif, animé, réfléchi, où chacun trouve de nouvelles façons de se réaliser. La perspective de l'alphabétisation devra être élargie, pour donner un sens aux possibilités de changement réel de ceux qui y participent.

Par ses effets, l'objectif de développement intégré qui sous-tend l'activité a incité toute la communauté à participer.

Un nouvel élément s'impose, qui prend en considération l'expérience et qui infléchit les stratégies des groupes naissants:

— L'alphabétisation élargit son objectif de continuité au deuxième cycle de l'enseignement de base qui dispense la scolarité obligatoire aux jeunes nés après 1967. Le premier cycle compte 42 inscrits, où se trouvent majoritairement femmes et jeunes gitans, qui s'organisent en deux sous-groupes selon leur niveau de connaissances. Le deuxième cycle compte 60 inscrits, répartis en trois classes;

— Les cours socio-éducatifs s'organisent en domaines d'initiation professionnelle faisant alterner coupe-couture et tricot à la machine, électricité et métallurgie, et en groupes d'âge hétérogènes. Les participants sont au nombre de 69 et se répartissent en trois groupes fonctionnant par dédoublement. Pour la première fois, il y a eu un groupe formé de dix femmes au foyer;

— La formation professionnelle s'articule avec la production de programmes locaux et de l'orientation vers des systèmes plus perfectionnés de formation et de qualification pour l'emploi;

— La formation complémentaire vise à favoriser l'éducation en matière de santé, en s'associant au centre de santé local;

— L'animation socioculturelle, qui consiste essentiellement à associer interlocuteurs et agents locaux (résidents et organismes), organise des centres de diffusion de l'information et crée des espaces culturels polyvalents, qui appuient le développement des compétences sociales.

Le cadre général de développement du mode de travail pédagogique dans l'alphabétisation est tout entier indissociable d'une dimension élargie qui se tourne de plus en plus vers l'extérieur, qui recherche sans cesse de nouvelles ressources, des cadres de référence, jetant une passerelle entre les développements socio-éducatif et culturel.

LES TÉMOIGNAGES

Les rapports des formateurs et apprenants sur leur vie quotidienne, où tous ont aménagé des espaces d'apprentissage réciproque, nous montrent que le but de l'alphabétisation est d'être le moteur des divers niveaux

éducatifs de base qui encouragent des relations communautaires adaptées aux dynamiques de développement régional et local.

Une animatrice

J'ai commencé en décembre 1988, comme boursière, mes activités de monitrice d'alphabétisation à Biquinha. Mon expérience d'enseignante était axée sur l'enseignement traditionnel (télé-école) dans le cadre normal d'une école, déjà ouverte, cependant, sur le milieu. J'avais vécu quelques expériences d'animation communautaire, mais c'étaient des actions sporadiques et ponctuelles. Le travail auprès des adolescents était un défi qui m'avait toujours séduite.

Quand j'ai commencé les réunions de travail en vue de l'intégration dans le groupe, je me suis vite rendu compte de l'importance des relations interpersonnelles et de la communication. Les mots clés étaient: faciliter, promouvoir, renforcer. L'approche quant aux divers contenus consistait à prendre en considération la vraie vie des personnes, et la lecture de la vie quotidienne précédait et accompagnait la lecture des mots et textes; les espaces organisés en zones ouvertes, qui créaient des moments continus d'apprentissage et d'autonomie grandissante pour les participants, avaient pour appuis la recherche et la réflexion.

Les participants faisaient appel au mouvement associatif local, qui a collaboré activement aux différentes initiatives.

En somme, nous avons créé un espace où nous avons tous grandi, où nous nous sommes épanouis, où nous nous sommes rééduqués. Ce fut et c'est encore ma grande école.

Mon rapport s'est enrichi du témoignage de quelques-uns de nos participants, choisis parmi ceux qui se distinguaient.

L'exemple de Maria et Monterio, un couple de gitans, est digne de mention. Maria a commencé à suivre le cours d'alphabétisation. Elle était analphabète complète. Elle allait régulièrement en classe et elle y a emmené son mari. Monteiro, gitan assez évolué, qui s'habillait, contrairement à sa femme, comme les Européens, était peu assidu au début et il n'était pas très motivé. Il s'est ensuite enthousiasmé, mais il avait peu de temps pour faire les travaux suggérés. Il aidait ses compagnons et quand il y avait des temps morts, il lisait le journal, qui ne le quittait pas. Maria, elle, n'a appris qu'à écrire son nom parce qu'une nouvelle grossesse est venue interrompre ses études. Mais elle avait promis de revenir. Plus tard, elle a suivi le cours d'artisanat et elle s'est fait un point d'honneur d'utiliser tous les ouvrages exécutés pour décorer sa baraque, qui était toujours propre. Dans

les colloques auxquels elle a participé, Maria a appris à utiliser le centre de santé. Son bébé est désormais suivi et elle est une mère dévouée. Son mari a terminé le 1er cycle et il a commencé à suivre le 2e cycle. Il a abandonné après deux mois. Contacté il y a peu de temps, il a manifesté le désir de revenir pour terminer le 2e cycle. L'équipe sportive locale l'a intégré dans ses rangs, car il avait montré du talent aux rencontres sportives organisées dans le cadre du cours d'alphabétisation. Le couple a commencé à se rendre compte de l'importance de la répartition des tâches à la maison. Tous deux nous rendent visite régulièrement et nous disent leur intention de continuer. De nombreux membres de cette très grande famille suivent des cours du soir et quelques-uns suivent encore le cours d'alphabétisation.

Susana était le type même de la « harengère ». Le groupe l'appelait « la malodorante » à cause de son manque d'hygiène. Sa famille passait pour une des plus négligées du quartier: elle était connue sous le sobriquet de « canot », parce que la maison était un véritable dépotoir où il semblait qu'on ne pouvait se déplacer qu'en canot. Susana utilisait un vocabulaire choquant, truffé de mots grossiers et d'argot, et défiait le monde dans un cri de révolte, parce qu'elle appartenait à une famille très pauvre. Le père était à la retraite. La mère faisait des ménages à l'occasion et elle avait encore des enfants en bas âge qui erraient dans le quartier, livrés à eux-mêmes. L'aîné, qui suivait aussi notre cours d'alphabétisation, s'est enfui à Lisbonne et Susana l'a imité, pour se libérer du joug d'une famille déséquilibrée. Tous deux ne revenaient que lorsqu'ils se trouvaient sans travail. Elle était une des élèves les moins ponctuelles et assidues au cours d'alphabétisation. Cependant elle lisait et écrivait régulièrement. Mais elle fuyait les cours de mathématiques. Avec beaucoup d'encadrement et de patience, elle a terminé le 1er cycle. À la même époque, elle a suivi un cours socio-éducatif de tricot manuel, pour lequel elle a manifesté peu d'intérêt. Elle n'a fait qu'une seule pièce, très imparfaite d'ailleurs, et, très contrariée, elle s'est résignée à ne l'étrenner qu'après l'exposition. Elle ne participait qu'irrégulièrement aux débats, aux colloques, aux expositions et aux fanfares. Elle a également suivi, avec des résultats à peine satisfaisants, un cours d'art décoratif, où elle déstabilisait le groupe par ses disputes. Elle s'est inscrite au 2e cycle, sans le terminer, continuant à entretenir des liens étroits avec le cours d'alphabétisation. Un de ses frères a terminé le 1er cycle et un autre a suivi des cours d'électricité.

Maria das Dores, née dans une famille qui ne l'avait jamais acceptée, vivait en partie de la « charité » d'une voisine qu'elle considère encore aujourd'hui comme sa mère. Sa famille est pauvre, avec de graves handicaps socio-économiques. On appelle Maria « nhonho », parce qu'elle a une lèvre déformée qui lui fait mal prononcer les mots, lui donne une diction peu claire qui entrave la communication verbale. Elle ne s'acceptait pas elle-même, elle s'isolait dans un coin de la salle, perdue dans son monde étroit et limité. Le fait de travailler dans une conserverie lui donnait une

odeur de poisson, et ses compagnons se moquaient d'elle cruellement. Elle était de ceux qui souffraient de la faim, ce qu'elle n'a avoué qu'après avoir gagné la confiance du professeur et s'être sentie à l'aise. Elle a terminé le 1er cycle, étant de plus en plus motivée, et, bien qu'elle n'était pas brillante, elle a obtenu le diplôme du cours d'alphabétisation. Elle a suivi, à la même époque, un cours socio-éducatif de tricot, avec un certain enthousiasme. Ensuite, elle a suivi un cours d'artisanat, où elle a montré goût et équilibre. Elle fut la seule à nous surprendre, et nous avons assisté à sa transformation personnelle et sociale. Au début de son adolescence, elle avait changé: elle s'était mise à fumer, à flirter avec les amis, pour ne pas se sentir différente de ses compagnes, et elle a pris ses distances avec l'école. Elle a suivi la première période du 2e cycle. Puis, on a signalé sa disparition du quartier, ce qui a préoccupé les professeurs. On a cherché à la trouver et on a découvert que, pour faire face à ses nombreux problèmes, dont la faim, elle avait commencé à travailler comme femme de ménage, en échange de nourriture seulement, ou presque. Elle a tâché de reprendre les classes, mais étant donné que les cours avaient lieu le soir et que les transports étaient peu nombreux et chers, elle a cessé d'aller en classe, promettant de revenir l'année suivante. Elle nous a avoué que l'école et le groupe dont elle faisait partie, qu'elle ne voyait plus que le dimanche, lui manquaient. Elle a entraîné deux de ses sœurs et un de ses frères aux cours.

Des résidents

Je m'appelle Albina Rosa et je suis la seule femme mariée à suivre le cours d'alphabétisation. J'ai 25 ans et je suis mère d'une belle petite fille de 4 ans qui va à la maternelle de Matosinhos. Avant, elle était ici à la crèche du quartier. Mais à trois ans, elle a dû changer. Je l'emmène là-bas et je vais la chercher tous les jours. J'habite un immeuble du quartier de Biquinha qui donne sur la rue de la Circonvallation. J'habitais auparavant dans une baraque, mais je suis venue habiter avec mon parrain pour prendre soin de lui. Quand il est mort, je suis restée. J'aime mon appartement et l'endroit où je vis parce que j'ai toutes les commodités qui me manquaient avant. J'ai suivi le cours de jardinage organisé par le Centre populaire et aujourd'hui j'exerce le métier de jardinière dans le quartier, bien qu'à titre précaire encore. J'aime mon métier, car j'adore les plantes et j'aime leur donner des soins pour embellir le paysage et l'intérieur de nos appartements. Elles donnent la santé à l'environnement et aux gens. Je rêve d'un emploi sûr. Je suis en train de préparer un programme de jardinage pour le quartier, avec d'autres résidents. Nous verrons bien ce que cela donnera. Pour réussir cela, je me suis inscrite au cours d'alphabétisation pour terminer le 1er cycle. J'ai fait de grands efforts pour ne pas rater les classes. Elles sont très importantes pour moi. J'apprends et je me rappelle beaucoup de choses que j'avais oubliées. Si je peux, je vais poursuivre mes études jusqu'au 2e cycle. Mon mari a suivi pendant deux années le cours d'alphabétisation, mais, à cause de ses horaires au travail,

il n'a pas atteint les objectifs fixés. Cette année, il est venu à l'école avec moi au début, mais après il a dû abandonner. Il est bon d'étudier. On se sent grandir comme des enfants. Quiconque a cette occasion ne doit pas la laisser filer.

Je m'appelle José Maria. Je suis le doyen des élèves, j'ai trente-deux ans, cinq enfants et j'aime beaucoup ma famille. J'habite dans un immeuble du quartier de Biquinha, près du stade et du Centre populaire. Je suis très heureux d'avoir une salle de bains, trois pièces et une cuisine. Moi, mes enfants et ma femme, nous faisons tout pour que la maison soit propre. Nous avons une vie très dure parce que nous allons d'un lieu à l'autre vendre notre marchandise. Nous nous levons à quatre ou cinq heures du matin pour gagner notre vie. Nous travaillons beaucoup, mais cela vaut la peine. Nous vivons bien, sans difficultés. Dans le quartier, il y a des gens qui vivent mal parce qu'ils ne veulent pas travailler. Au siège du Centre populaire, j'ai appris qu'il y avait un cours d'alphabétisation et comme j'habite près de l'école j'y vais tous les jours, mais seulement pour un petit bout de temps. Cela ne me fait rien de prendre mon temps: ce que je veux, c'est réussir le cours d'alphabétisation. J'ai suivi le cours à Matosinhos, mais comme c'était loin j'ai abandonné. Ici à Biquinha, je suis le cours depuis trois ans. Cette année, j'ai appris à lire et à écrire. J'ai un fils qui s'appelle Mario et qui va à l'école le jour. J'éprouve un grand bonheur à lui venir en aide quand il en a besoin. Les aînés ne sont pas allés à l'école, mais quand ils auront l'âge ils suivront les cours pour adultes. Mes camarades de classe veulent le diplôme pour avoir leur permis de conduire. Moi, je l'ai déjà et je conduis une fourgonnette. Comme je travaille beaucoup, le soir, après l'école, j'aime aller au siège du Centre pour jouer aux cartes avec mes voisins et mes amis. J'aime vivre ici à Biquinha. Nous sommes tous contents de notre quartier, qui fait aujourd'hui l'envie des autres. Mais c'est nous qui faisons de notre mieux pour le rendre plus agréable. Autrefois, le Centre n'organisait que des sports. Aujourd'hui, il s'emploie à organiser d'autres activités et le soir nous n'arrêtons pas de penser à de nouvelles activités. Les cours pour adultes sont très importants.

Je m'appelle André Monteiro et j'ai dix-neuf ans. Je suis né à Matosinhos et j'y habite. Je suis marié et j'habite dans une baraque, petite mais proprette. C'est mieux que certaines maisons à Biquinha. Nous avons la télévision, avec magnétoscope, et la «hi-fi». Je n'aimerais pas vivre dans ce quartier-là. Il y a beaucoup de monde et beaucoup de désordre. J'aime l'endroit où je vis et si je devais déménager, je serais malheureux. J'ai su grâce à un de mes cousins gitans qu'il y avait une école du soir à Biquinha. Alors j'y suis allé et je m'en réjouis. Chaque jour, je réussis à faire quelque chose de neuf. Mon cousin Felizgardo est celui qui en sait le plus parce qu'il ne rate jamais les cours. Parfois nous n'avons pas le temps de prendre un bain: après avoir chargé et déchargé les voitures et les camions de l'entreprise pour laquelle nous travaillons, nous allons tout droit à l'école

parce que nous aimons commencer tôt les classes. Quand nous avons faim, nous allons souper. Dans les cours du soir, nous avons fait un journal avec de petits textes et nous avons écrit nos noms. Nous faisons des photographies, nous regardons des images et ensuite nous écrivons des textes sur les affiches. C'est ce que nous faisons dans les cours. Avec Mario, nous avons fait des paniers que nous avons vendus pendant la fête. Mais c'est seulement pour le plaisir parce que cela ne rapporte pas. Quand le cœur m'en dit, je vais au cours d'électricité. Je sais déjà faire des connexions et utiliser les outils. Chez nous, pour avoir la lumière, nous faisons déjà des connexions avec l'éclairage public. J'achète déjà le journal, que je lis au café. Je comprends seulement quelques mots, les autres je les découvre à l'école. L'année prochaine, je compte avoir mon diplôme pour pouvoir acheter une voiture et aller vendre dans les foires. C'est plus lucratif que mon travail, et si un jour je peux gagner 3 000 escudos, je pourrai passer deux ou trois jours sans travailler. La famille doit manger tous les jours. Quand j'irai vendre, ma femme ira apprendre à lire.

Un résident, membre de la direction du CPTQB

Je m'appelle Manuel da Cruz Dias. Je suis marié et je suis père de huit enfants. J'ai 45 ans et je suis né à Esmoriz. Je vis dans le quartier de Biquinha depuis 11 ans. Au début, j'ai eu du mal à m'adapter parce que je ne connaissais personne et que je n'avais pas l'habitude de vivre dans un quartier comme celui-là. La seule distraction qu'il y avait, c'était le CPTQB. Avec le temps, je me suis habitué, je me suis fait de nouveaux amis et aujourd'hui si on m'enlevait le quartier de Biquinha on m'enlèverait tout.

Je fais partie de la direction du Centre, avec 11 autres directeurs. Nous nous réunissons un soir par semaine, avec l'assistante sociale de la municipalité et avec le professeur pour adultes. Nous discutons de sujets liés au projet du quartier. Parfois, il y a d'autres personnes associées de près ou de loin à notre travail, par exemple une journaliste française qui a parlé de nous et de notre travail dans son journal. Notre travail est entièrement bénévole. Dans notre salle des sports, nous avons organisé des matchs de football et de handball pour les enfants, les jeunes et les adultes. La pêche, le tennis de table et l'athlétisme sont nos nouvelles activités. Nos jeunes s'entraînent et enseignent dans le cadre des programmes de loisirs de l'Institut de la jeunesse. Nous faisons aussi de nombreuses visites dans des lieux importants, comme l'Inatel et le stade d'Antas. Nous organisons avec les professeurs et les moniteurs toutes les activités de l'école des adultes. Notre budget étant commun, nous avons beaucoup de travail. Le projet d'aide aux associations accorde de mars à décembre une subvention à un jeune qui nous prête son appui.

Désormais, notre Centre organise, outre des activités sportives, la fête de Noël, l'anniversaire du Centre, les cortèges et défilés du carnaval,

les journées mondiales de l'enfance et de la jeunesse, l'Expovida et la Saint-Jean. Tout cela se fait avec nos jeunes et à l'école d'adultes. L'Expovida est une grande fête: celle de l'école de jour, de l'école du soir et de la mini-crèche. À cette occasion, beaucoup de gens de l'extérieur nous rendent visite.

Étant en congé après avoir été opéré à la colonne vertébrale, j'ai été invité par le président du Centre à aller tous les soirs, de 18 h 30 à 23 h, collaborer avec les professeurs et les élèves pendant les cours. J'ai commencé le 3 janvier 1990. Il y avait beaucoup d'élèves et il n'était pas facile de contrôler des jeunes et adultes de 14 à 40 ans. Par un travail sérieux et responsable, toujours accompagné d'une grande tolérance, la jeunesse a pris l'habitude de la discipline et de l'éducation, contrairement à ce qu'on pourrait penser. Hormis un cas ou deux, tout s'est très bien passé.

Cette année, les choses ont été plus faciles parce que beaucoup avaient déjà l'habitude des règles. Je me suis lié d'amitié avec les élèves parce que nous sommes tous du même quartier, mais aussi avec les professeurs et les moniteurs. Nous nous sommes toujours respectés, chacun s'acquittant de ses fonctions de manière responsable. Certains professeurs ont été remplacés mais l'amitié continue. Nous arrivons à la fin de l'année scolaire et j'attends déjà avec impatience la rentrée en septembre pour pouvoir continuer à collaborer à cette tâche qui me plaît tellement.

Un ancien élève qui est moniteur pour les enfants

Les trois dernières années en valent dix. À la fin de 1988, nous avons lancé à Biquinha diverses initiatives, dont le cours d'alphabétisation et les cours socio-éducatifs. Les objectifs étaient simples et les résultats ont dépassé toutes nos attentes au bout de seulement trois ans. La première difficulté était de savoir si les intéressés feraient bon accueil à cette grande initiative. La difficulté s'est éclipsée rapidement: tout le monde s'est vite rangé de notre côté.

Moi, j'ai été un des premiers à m'inscrire aux cours d'alphabétisation et d'électricité, dès que j'en ai appris l'existence. Je savais que cela me profiterait, ne serait-ce qu'en fréquentant mes compagnons de classe et les moniteurs. Idem pour ma mère et mes deux sœurs, qui sont venues aussi. Nous avons démarré avec de grandes hésitations mais avec de grands espoirs aussi.

Le succès est venu dès la première année. La preuve, c'est que nous n'avons pas abandonné les cours. Nous étions très assidus et nous avions plein d'idées. Le temps fort fut l'Expovida, où nous avons présenté les nombreux travaux que nous avions faits avec grand plaisir et grand enthousiasme. À la fin, nous avons organisé une énorme fête où nous avons dansé

dans la salle des sports de notre quartier. Et nous avons déjà fait Expovida II et III, chaque fois plus réussie. Ce fut un grand événement, dont je tire une grande fierté et le sentiment d'avoir réalisé quelque chose.

Mais qu'est-ce que ces cours représentaient pour nous? Quelles valeurs y étaient attachées? Quelle était leur importance? Ils furent le tremplin du développement socioculturel, voire professionnel, d'une communauté en proie à de grandes difficultés, qui n'arrivait pas à s'épanouir: ma communauté à moi. Plusieurs de mes collègues ont réussi à décrocher un emploi, d'autres travaillent déjà à leur propre compte, qui comme électricien, qui comme mécanicien, qui comme couturière. D'autres encore, qui ne savaient ni lire ni écrire, même pas leur nom, savent désormais lire et écrire et peuvent comprendre ce qui se passe autour d'eux. Ce fut une grande réussite. Ma mère, à 47 ans, a pris un emploi et ma sœur l'a imitée. «Un succès en attire d'autres», selon un vieux dicton qui dit vrai. Ce fut ainsi pour nous. Aux premiers projets ont succédé d'autres projets, également couronnés de succès, par exemple les activités de loisirs, dont je suis l'animateur. Cette activité s'adresse à tous les enfants de Biquinha, pour les occuper pendant leurs heures de loisir, pour leur éviter de traîner dans les rues «sans feu ni lieu».

Le soir, je poursuis mes études. J'ai appris entre autres à bien me conduire avec les autres et à respecter les choses. J'ai déjà terminé le cours professionnel d'informatique et maintenant, au siège du Centre, Zé Silva et moi allons apprendre l'informatique aux jeunes. J'espère que le présent est gage de l'avenir, parce que nous avons de grandes attentes et que nous ne cessons d'ouvrir de nouveaux horizons.

Une monitrice du cours de couture

Je m'appelle Laura et j'habite à Biquinha depuis exactement 18 ans, dans le vieux quartier, comme on dit ici. Je suis mariée et j'ai deux enfants. J'habite avec mes parents et ma sœur dans un deux-pièces. Nous avons commencé il y a trois ans à adopter de nouvelles façons de voir nos problèmes.

Tout a commencé au siège du Centre avec le professeur pour adultes et avec l'assistante sociale de la municipalité. Tous ont été enthousiasmés et le projet a vite attiré beaucoup de jeunes. On m'a demandé de devenir monitrice d'un cours de couture. Cette idée, qui ne m'avait jamais effleuré l'esprit, m'a enthousiasmée. D'abord, il y a eu le cours d'alphabétisation, et l'école a ouvert ses portes le soir. Le quartier a commencé à s'animer de manière différente et les gens ont compris qu'il y avait là un moyen de résoudre leurs problèmes et de changer leur vie. Les choses ont évolué très rapidement grâce aux efforts de la population et du Centre. Les cours étaient une planche de salut pour beaucoup et ils ont mobilisé le quartier

comme cela ne s'était jamais vu. La salle des sports et le pavillon polyvalent ont commencé aussi à servir le soir et les gens se sont intéressés à ce qui s'y passait. Ils ont participé à quelques-unes de nos activités, comme les colloques, les lectures et le cinéma.

Le premier cours de couture a commencé en janvier 1989. C'est la troisième année que je travaille avec les jeunes filles et la deuxième année avec les femmes au foyer. Les deux groupes ont des besoins et des goûts différents et font donc des travaux différents. Nous avons souvent des travaux communs avec les élèves du cours d'alphabétisation. De nombreuses jeunes filles ont déjà réussi à trouver un emploi dans le textile, d'autres ont suivi des stages professionnels plus avancés et d'autres encore ont quitté la conserverie, qu'elles détestaient, pour se mettre à la couture. Parfois, pendant le cours, elles éprouvent le besoin de suivre le cours d'alphabétisation et le cycle préparatoire. Quand elles terminent le cours, elles réussissent presque toutes à travailler à la commande pour des revues de mode et elles font la plupart de leurs vêtements ainsi que des choses utiles pour la maison. Elles se sentent beaucoup plus jolies tout en économisant beaucoup d'argent.

À l'heure actuelle, de nouvelles difficultés surgissent avec la construction de nouveaux immeubles: nous aurons un nouveau siège, des bureaux, une boulangerie, un minimarché, un coiffeur et une salle de loisirs pour les enfants. Mais notre grand problème reste l'habitat. Il y a des deux-pièces qui abritent 21 personnes. Chaque semaine nous discutons de ces problèmes et nous pensons que certains résidents arriveront à résoudre leurs problèmes. Il est dommage qu'il n'y ait pas assez d'appartements pour tous.

C'est avec beaucoup de respect pour nous-mêmes que nous travaillons, avec un grand dévouement, à faire de Biquinha un quartier enviable.

NOTES

1. *Queques rafeiros — queques*: mot de la langue populaire désignant les habitants des quartiers riches, ici employé dans un sens péjoratif. *Rafeiros*: nom donné aux chiens bâtards.

2. En 1988, seulement 12 personnes ont terminé la scolarité obligatoire, qui est de 6 ans.

3. Soixante-cinq familles ont un revenu qui se situe entre 5 000 et 15 000 escudos.

4. Voir Paulo Freire, *La pédagogie des opprimés*.

ALPHABÉTISATION ET DÉVELOPPEMENT DANS UNE COMMUNAUTÉ GITANE*

Olívia Oliveira
avec Sameiro Nova et Gloria Coelho
Braga, Portugal

* Traduit du portugais

L'ESQUISSE DU PROJET

Le projet de développement dans la communauté gitane de S. Gregório, dans la périphérie de la ville de Braga, au nord du Portugal, est né d'une initiative du Centre régional de la sécurité sociale dans le but d'améliorer les conditions de vie des gitans de S. Gregório, de favoriser leur autonomie à l'égard des services sociaux et de faciliter leur intégration dans la société portugaise. Le projet a été réalisé grâce aux efforts conjugués de la mairie de Braga et de divers organismes: la Croix-Rouge portugaise, l'Éducation permanente («Extensao Educativa»), le centre de santé, l'Institut de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle, l'Association industrielle du Minho et la Direction générale des sports. De tous ces organismes, ceux qui ont joué un rôle vraiment important, par la continuité de leur action, ont été la Sécurité sociale, l'Éducation permanente et le centre de santé.

L'idée du projet est née lorsque que le Centre régional de la sécurité sociale s'est aperçu que c'étaient principalement les membres de la communauté gitane de S. Gregório qui faisaient appel à ses services d'accueil et qui dépendaient de l'assistance de cet organisme. Leur assiduité au Centre ne signifiait toutefois pas que les gitans savaient en tirer plus d'avantages.

Une analyse plus approfondie des dossiers concernant ces gitans a confirmé que le village de S. Gregório manquait sérieusement de ressources dans les domaines économique, social et éducatif.

Aussi a-t-on conclu qu'il était nécessaire d'agir. On a donc commencé à esquisser un projet de développement communautaire qui a débuté en avril 1988 et qui comprenait trois phases: la première de diagnostic, la deuxième d'exécution/évaluation, la troisième de transition vers l'autonomie de la population gitane. En ce moment, le projet en est à cette dernière phase.

Disposant de fonds qu'elle ne pouvait utiliser directement, la Sécurité sociale a commencé par se mettre d'accord avec la Croix-Rouge. Cette dernière étant une organisation non gouvernementale (ONG), elle pouvait être subventionnée. C'est ainsi que les fonds nécessaires ont été débloqués et que le projet a pu démarrer.

Pour commencer, la Sécurité sociale a créé une équipe de travail qui devait être sur le terrain à plein temps. Cette équipe, formée de deux assistantes sociales et de deux éducatrices sociales, était organisée et appuyée par une équipe d'encadrement, constituée en général de représentants de quelques-uns des organismes engagés dans le projet (l'auteur du présent texte en faisait partie).

Quelques questions de fond se sont posées avant que le projet ne soit esquissé. Comme il s'agissait d'un groupe pauvre au point de vue économique et appartenant à une minorité ethnique, il était indispensable de déterminer ce qui le distinguait d'autres groupes démunis dont les comportements, les attitudes et le mode de vie paraissaient semblables.

Comment percevons-nous les gitans? L'image négative, plus ou moins généralisée — individus sordides, astucieux, vauriens, tricheurs, fourbes, dangereux, violents, voleurs* —, est-elle fondée ou est-elle tout simplement le fait de préjugés résultant d'une analyse superficielle des comportements d'«autodéfense» des gitans, qui cachent la véritable nature de leur personnalité au sein de leur groupe? Et les gitans, que pensent-ils de nous? Comment nous voient-ils? Comment se voient-ils eux-mêmes? Et comment se voient-ils en tant que groupe inséré dans une culture étrangère et dominante?

C'était à partir de ces questions qu'il fallait commencer; vérifier si nos jugements à leur égard étaient justes, connaître leur opinion sur nous; comprendre la trame socioculturelle de leur communauté, délimiter le noyau du conflit et de l'opposition tout en définissant de façon claire les zones d'ouverture qui nous permettraient d'accéder à la population gitane pour créer des liens, gagner sa confiance et la mobiliser pour le projet.

D'autres questions se posaient également. Comment orienter le travail? Partir de la culture gitane pour arriver à la culture dominante? Ou mettre le projet sur pied dans le cadre culturel de la communauté? Mais cette dernière option pourrait entraîner des problèmes complexes en ce qui concerne l'intégration du groupe. En effet, les gitans ne vivent pas leur vie quotidienne d'une façon autiste. Ils sont commerçants et doivent entrer en contact et négocier avec des non-gitans. Ils sont Portugais et ont des rapports avec les institutions du pays. Ils sont insérés dans une société en changement rapide, à laquelle se posent de nombreux défis, aujourd'hui surtout, alors que le Portugal est engagé dans un processus accéléré de modernisation en vue de sa complète intégration à la Communauté économique européenne.

* D'après la définition du *Dicionário Enciclopédico Koogan Larousse Selecções*.

Nous en sommes arrivés à la conclusion que les gitans ne deviendraient pas autosuffisants s'ils continuaient de vivre enfermés dans leur univers; qu'ils ne sauraient se développer dans l'ostracisme culturel. C'est par le contact et la confrontation sociale qu'une communauté peut se développer. Sur le plan théorique, la confrontation avec d'autres cultures est possible sans pour autant que soit dénaturé ce qui est essentiel dans la culture d'origine. Le principe adopté fut celui de l'intégration de ce qui était nouveau dans ce qui était traditionnel, en partant de la supposition qu'il existe dans toute tradition des aspects qui ne sont pas inviolables et qui se modifient avec l'évolution générale et le progrès de la société d'accueil.

Il y avait encore un risque à considérer. En devenant les sujets d'un projet qui les entraînerait dans un processus de changement, les gitans pourraient adopter un comportement hybride qui les ferait perdre tout sentiment d'appartenance, leur identité en tant qu'êtres humains et êtres culturels. D'autres expériences ont démontré que dans de telles situations les gitans et d'autres groupes minoritaires défavorisés réagissent en se renfermant en eux-mêmes et dans leur culture, en devenant imperméables aux changements ou encore en manifestant leur insécurité par des comportements indésirables.

Pour éviter cela, on a décidé que pendant le projet ces gitans devraient être constamment accompagnés (d'où la nécessité d'une équipe de quatre personnes à plein temps) et que l'on devrait créer des activités d'animation culturelle pour leur faciliter une restructuration ou, éventuellement, une structuration intérieure, et leur permettre de comprendre les phénomènes qui étaient en train de se produire, tant sur le plan individuel que collectif, au sein de la communauté.

Une autre question importante s'est posée, cette fois quant au type d'action. Ou bien nous serions l'État-providence qui sait ce qui est bon pour eux ou, tout à l'opposé, nous nous pencherions avec eux sur leurs problèmes et, ensemble, nous déciderions ce qu'ils veulent et ce qui peut être fait.

Dans le premier cas, une fois le projet terminé et l'équipe de travail partie, on courait fort le risque d'un retour de la communauté à sa situation initiale.

Aussi a-t-on choisi la seconde possibilité. On a privilégié un projet de développement auquel la communauté participe et qui lui permette d'acquérir les compétences qui l'aideraient à s'acheminer graduellement vers une réelle autonomie.

Il faudrait réfléchir avec les membres de la communauté sur les conditions qui les ont amenés à la pauvreté, à la maladie et à la marginalisation. Analyser ensemble leurs problèmes, leurs besoins, leurs aspirations.

Leur faire comprendre que ceux qui se proposaient de travailler dans la communauté avec eux n'avaient pas l'intention de les amener là où ils ne voulaient pas aller, mais plutôt de découvrir, avec eux, les meilleures voies, les meilleures solutions. Les éclairer sur le fait que pour qu'ils puissent bénéficier des avantages de la société dans laquelle leur communauté est intégrée, il était nécessaire d'entreprendre des actions dans lesquelles ils devraient s'engager et auxquelles ils devraient participer.

De ce point de vue, la conception générale du projet est fondée sur quelques propositions:

— Tous ont le droit à la diversité et à la différence par rapport à la norme;

— Il n'y a pas de cultures supérieures et de cultures inférieures, il n'y a que des cultures dominantes et des cultures dominées;

— Tous sont nés avec un potentiel à développer qui peut en faire des individus capables d'apprendre et de juger ce qui est nécessaire à une action réfléchie;

— Les individus, pour être libres (et non pas dominés), doivent avoir le droit de participer aux transformations qui s'opèrent en eux-mêmes et dans leur communauté;

— Il faut étudier (sans relâche) une communauté pour pouvoir en comprendre en profondeur la dynamique des interactions.

De là découlent les principes sur lesquels est fondée la ligne directrice de notre action:

— Le respect des personnes et de leurs différences;

— Le partage entre cultures, qui permet une réflexion critique sur la diversité des valeurs culturelles et qui facilite le dialogue et la relation avec les nouvelles valeurs du monde d'interdépendance dans lequel nous vivons;

— L'étude préalable et continue de la communauté pour permettre de trouver les réponses adéquates aux problèmes, en fonction des objectifs définis dans le projet;

— La participation de la population, par l'intermédiaire des ses représentants légitimes, à toutes les phases du projet, notamment aux décisions finales; toute intervention devant être faite «pour» et «avec» les membres de la communauté;

— Le développement des capacités de chacun, en réduisant l'importance habituellement attribuée aux capacités intellectuelles et cognitives, et en misant sur les aptitudes relationnelles et comportementales et sur le sens de l'organisation, cela devant entraîner un changement des rôles sociaux et permettre l'acquisition des mécanismes indispensables pour influer sur sa propre vie et pour agir dans la communauté.

L'alphabétisation dans le contexte du projet

Les gitans étant un peuple de tradition orale, ils ne peuvent être considérés comme analphabètes dans leur langue maternelle, qui n'a pas de système d'écriture; ils ne sont illettrés que dans la langue dominante, le portugais.

Le fait d'être illettré dans une société où l'écriture est omniprésente les empêche d'avoir accès à une bonne partie de l'information qui est indispensable à leur vie quotidienne, à leur bien-être, voire à leur survie par l'amélioration de leurs conditions de vie.

Nous sommes conscients que malgré le fait que les gitans n'ont pas besoin de la lecture et de l'écriture dans leur culture, l'impossibilité pour eux de lire et d'écrire dans la langue de la culture dominante rend plus difficiles leurs problèmes quotidiens, les relations avec la communauté portugaise, l'accès aux services publics et surtout l'accès à la richesse et aux avantages, qui sont réservés à ceux qui ont pu profiter de l'instruction.

Dans un tel contexte, dès le début, l'alphabétisation des adultes s'avère prioritaire: une des premières actions à entreprendre à S. Gregório. Elle a commencé déjà pendant la phase d'étude de la communauté et elle est même devenue pour les animateurs un lieu privilégié pour obtenir de l'information et apprendre à connaître la population gitane.

Nous avons trouvé chez Paulo Freire le soutien théorique qui, dès le départ, garantissait la réussite de notre action:

— La reconnaissance de la capacité de tout être humain à apprendre dès qu'il est dans les conditions pour le faire, l'absence de ces conditions étant due à certaines caractéristiques structurelles de la société;

— L'alphabétisation comme moyen de conscientiser et de permettre une approche critique de la réalité;

— La valorisation de l'expérience et le respect de l'identité culturelle et des valeurs traditionnelles;

— La lecture et l'écriture des «mots», considérées non pas comme une fin en soi, mais comme un moyen de décoder et coder le monde et la société.

Dans la mesure où le processus d'alphabétisation est à la fois un acte de connaissance et un acte créateur, la personne qui apprend est l'agent de son apprentissage et, de ce fait, le risque de la manipuler et de dénaturer son identité culturelle se trouve réduit.

Fondée sur ces principes, l'alphabétisation, orientée au tout début par une des éducatrices sociales de l'équipe du projet (et coauteur du texte), a été et continue d'être l'action qui lie et parachève le mieux toutes les autres.

Toutes les questions, de la santé au travail, tous les problèmes, toutes les aspirations sont discutés durant les cours; ils constituent l'univers thématique de l'apprentissage, débordant l'apprentissage scolaire lui-même. On discute de tous les sujets, on ouvre des débats, on réfléchit, on prend conscience. Presque toutes les activités du projet convergent vers le cours d'alphabétisation, et à partir de là, par la praxis, d'autres actions sont déclenchées. L'alphabétisation a encore joué un rôle important dans la préparation des gitans aux changements que, de façon continue, ils connaissent.

L'ÉTUDE DE LA COMMUNAUTÉ

Une perspective de recherche

Lorsque nous nous plaçons sur le terrain des minorités ethniques — ou des milieux défavorisés (ces deux catégories étant ici confondues) —, nous nous trouvons devant un champ d'exploration diversifié et complexe: un enchevêtrement de problèmes sociaux et de contrastes culturels. Dans de tels contextes, la recherche devient tout à fait indispensable. Une recherche appliquée qui fasse appel à la participation et qui soit en même temps conçue comme une stratégie d'innovation dans le changement qualitatif des pratiques sociales des «acteurs» qui y sont engagés.

Quelques principes directeurs ont été définis:

— Le besoin d'une étude numérique et statistique;

— L'ouverture d'un dialogue pour comprendre comment les gitans se voient eux-mêmes, quels sont les concepts qui déterminent leur façon d'agir — une analyse phénoménologique;

— La connaissance des lieux de rencontre: services publics, magasins, marchés, foires, etc.;

— La connaissance des leaders de la communauté et de leurs représentants légitimes, qui peuvent devenir des interlocuteurs dans le projet;

— La recherche des témoignages de tous ceux qui directement ou indirectement sont en rapport avec les gitans;

— La participation des gitans, le plus tôt possible, dans le projet (si nous voulons qu'ils soient vraiment les protagonistes de leur développement), et la délimitation du champ d'interaction concrète où s'établissent les compromis entre eux et l'équipe;

— La création de conditions favorables au développement de comportements qui soient de nature à aider les gitans à améliorer leur sort (en diffusant des idées, en suggérant des façons de s'émanciper.

On comprendra que notre idée directrice était de faire une recherche qui serait en même temps une réflexion/action; et cela à partir du moment où il y aurait participation.

Le contact avec la population, tout simplement pour se renseigner, amène à poser des questions, à établir des liens spontanés, des compromis, des complicités.

Raisons et objectifs de l'étude

Par l'étude de la communauté, nous avons voulu obtenir des renseignements permettant:

— de trouver des solutions rapides et efficaces à l'ensemble des problèmes afin de permettre un développement social et économique équilibré de la communauté gitane selon ses valeurs culturelles;

— de trouver des réponses qui correspondent aux besoins de la communauté gitane qui est aux prises, simultanément, avec un processus de sédentarisation et un processus de changement issus de son insertion dans la société dominante;

— de définir et établir les objectifs généraux du projet;

— de définir des secteurs ou zones d'action prioritaires mettant en rapport les problèmes, les besoins, les aspirations et les ressources;

— de déterminer les objectifs et le champ d'action des personnes qui font partie du projet;

— de déterminer quelles sont les répercussions sur les plans culturel et éducatif de l'action communautaire auprès d'une minorité ethnique;

— d'adapter les stratégies à la réalité des gitans et à leur dynamique socioculturelle.

À partir de ces quelques grandes lignes, nous avons défini les objectifs de l'étude:

— Détecter les principaux problèmes de la communauté, notamment ceux qui sont en rapport avec les infrastructures de base;

— Détecter les besoins auxquels nous pouvions répondre par de la formation;

— Connaître les principales aspirations de la communauté;

— Comprendre l'organisation socio-économique et culturelle de la communauté;

— Connaître les facteurs psychologiques, idéologiques et culturels qui peuvent orienter l'action et les facteurs qui pourraient empêcher la réalisation du projet;

— Connaître les intérêts collectifs de la communauté;

— Connaître l'emploi du temps des différents groupes de la communauté en vue du choix des meilleures heures, des meilleurs jours, des meilleures dates pour mener les actions;

— Définir le cadre (école, centre de loisirs, etc.) où les actions auraient lieu;

— Dresser la liste des ressources humaines et autres;

— Choisir les locaux où les actions auraient lieu;

— Comprendre l'importance que les gitans accordent au fait d'être illettré dans la langue de la société dominante;

— Comprendre en quoi le fait d'être illettré rend difficile leur vie quotidienne;

— Connaître leur prédisposition à l'apprentissage, à l'alphabétisation (étant donné qu'on connaît déjà leur taux élevé d'analphabétisme);

— Connaître les indices de l'échec scolaire des enfants et en déterminer les causes.

Méthodologie de l'étude de la communauté

Nous avons établi un plan comprenant trois phases:

1re — Consultation des documents et fichiers des différents services qui sont en contact avec la communauté;

2e — Interviews avec des responsables de ces services, des voisins et des gitans;

3e — Observation participante.

Première phase

Nous avons commencé par étudier tous les documents et fichiers existant dans les services auxquels les gitans s'adressaient (la Sécurité sociale, la mairie, les services de santé et les écoles primaires).

La bureaucratie a rendu notre recherche un peu difficile, mais avec de la persévérance, nous avons réussi à dresser un rapport des besoins de la communauté.

Deuxième phase

Pendant que nous faisions la collecte des données, nous avons interviewé les responsables et les employés des différents services qui avaient des contacts directs avec les gitans.

Nous sommes également allés voir les propriétaires de l'épicerie, de la boucherie, de la pharmacie où les gitans faisaient leurs achats; nous avons interviewé quelques-uns de leurs voisins. Nous avons ainsi pu saisir le degré d'acceptation des gitans par la communauté, leur comportement, leurs rapports de voisinage, et nous avons pu déterminer qui étaient leurs leaders naturels. Ces renseignements ont facilité l'approche directe et notre introduction auprès des familles gitanes.

Dès les premiers contacts, nous nous sommes aperçus que, le plus souvent, nous devions faire notre approche par un entretien plutôt qu'une interview, en posant des questions ouvertes auxquelles les gens répondaient

en développant à leur guise. Souvent les questions posées donnaient place à des «histoires vécues», riches de tradition et d'un grand intérêt.

Pour commencer nous avons choisi des entretiens informels avec des chefs de famille, des hommes, et parmi les plus âgés et les plus évolués, en tenant compte aussi de leur prestige au sein de la communauté. Des rendez-vous devaient être pris, puisque ces hommes étaient absents presque toute la journée, occupés aux ventes dans les foires.

Aux premiers contacts, les gitans sont fermés, méfiants. Petit à petit, ils acceptent l'étranger et, dès qu'ils l'acceptent et que l'étranger gagne leur confiance, ils deviennent francs et loyaux. Ils vous reçoivent avec plaisir, sont aimables, vous invitent chez eux. On ne conquiert leur totale confiance qu'après un an environ de rapports réguliers.

Dès le début nous avons adopté le doute systématique à l'égard des renseignements qu'on nous donnait.

Les entretiens en groupe étaient plus difficiles, surtout au début. Les gens étaient inhibés en présence les uns des autres, détournaient les questions en parlant d'autre chose. Ils se sentaient sous l'emprise du groupe et tous craignaient de répondre. Une fois leur confiance acquise, leurs craintes se sont progressivement dissipées, ils sont devenus plus ouverts et la spontanéité s'est installée.

Troisième phase

L'observation participante, la technique que nous avons utilisée le plus, nous a permis d'acquérir une connaissance plus exacte de la culture, la tradition et la psychologie des gitans. Nous avons pris part à leur vie de tous les jours, à différents moments; en observant leurs rapports familiaux et leurs rapports avec le groupe, petit à petit nous avons compris leur *modus vivendi* et changé nos idées préconçues et les préjugés négatifs que nous avions à leur égard. Ils nous ont invités à boire du café et à goûter leur cuisine, à participer à un mariage, etc. Nous les avons observés pendant leur culte religieux.

En peu de temps, nous avons pu connaître ce peuple et atteindre la plupart des objectis visés. L'équipe du projet a trouvé là les fondements d'une action plus consistante et sûre: elle a consolidé sa participation et son engagement dans la communauté et découvert avec plus de précision les questions à traiter et les stratégies à adopter.

Nous avons conclu qu'un modèle de ce type n'était pas adapté à de grands projets organisés sur un territoire très vaste, mais qu'il était parfaitement adapté à une action centrée sur les problèmes sociaux, qui fait

plutôt appel à des données qualitatives (explicatives) que quantitatives et qui n'est possible que lorsqu'on dispose de certains moyens, notamment une équipe à plein temps.

LA POPULATION GITANE*

Le contexte socio-économique

On connaît très peu de choses sur l'histoire de la communauté gitane de S. Gregório de Braga. Sa culture sans système d'écriture et l'absence de documents nous empêchent de la bien connaître. Personne, même parmi les plus âgés, n'a rien su nous dire sur son pays d'origine. La mémoire des ancêtres se perd à la quatrième génération et la mémoire historique de l'origine de la communauté n'est guère plus longue. À peine sait-on que les ancêtres sont venus de cet endroit où depuis très longtemps les gitans ont choisi de s'installer, c'est-à-dire l'Andalousie, en Espagne. Pourtant, les familles de S. Gregório sont originaires du Portugal, des diverses régions du pays; il n'y a aucune famille ni aucun individu qui soient nés en Espagne. D'après les membres de la communauté, les ancêtres seraient venus au Portugal, parce qu'ils y trouvaient des avantages sur le plan économique et de l'assistance.

Au début, la communauté de S. Gregório comprenait 17 familles comptant au total 94 personnes. Le nombre moyen d'enfants par famille était de quatre à cinq. Actuellement la situation est différente: il y a 23 familles et un total de 115 personnes.

Les familles demeurent dans des baraques d'une seule pièce dont le sol est en terre battue ou en ciment. Chaque baraque a l'électricité et l'approvisionnement en eau est collectif. Il n'y a pas de réseau sanitaire d'égouts et l'accès au quartier, placé sur la colline de S. Gregório, est difficile, car il n'y a qu'une seule voie.

Les gens disposent de l'autobus à une distance de 750 mètres. Ils font leurs achats chez l'épicier et le boucher, à un kilomètre. Ils achètent à crédit et ne paient leurs dettes que lorsqu'ils reçoivent les allocations de la Sécurité sociale.

Le commerce est la principale occupation des membres de la communauté: ils sont forains, marchands ambulants, négociants de chevaux. Quelques-uns font de temps en temps des paniers, palliatif temporaire aux difficultés des affaires. Les femmes aident leur mari et s'occupent des tâches ménagères.

* Certaines données ont été tirées de Nunes, Olimpo, *O Povo Cigano*, Porto, Librairie Apostolado da Imprensa, 1981.

Malgré leurs conditions de logement, certaines familles gitanes ont une bonne situation économique: elles possèdent de l'or, une télévision couleur, un magnétoscope, une machine à laver, le téléphone, une voiture, un frigo, des meubles, etc. Pour la plupart, la voiture est nécessaire pour le travail et ne constitue pas un symbole de richesse ou de prospérité.

En période de crise, la mendicité demeure une façon d'obtenir de quoi se nourrir, et c'est la tâche des femmes et des enfants. Pour survivre, les gitans font fréquemment appel à la Sécurité sociale, en exagérant leur pauvreté et leur misère et en se présentant plus loqueteux que d'habitude.

Ils sont dans un état de santé précaire, voire inquiétant. La pauvreté, les mauvaises conditions de logement, l'hygiène douteuse, le bas niveau de scolarisation et surtout le style de vie sont les causes des graves erreurs qu'ils commettent en matière de prévention et de traitement des maladies. Ils subissent tous les inconvénients du climat, sans se protéger de la pluie, du froid ou de la chaleur; ils dorment souvent avec les vêtements de la journée, et les enfants se couchent et se lèvent aux mêmes heures que les adultes. Ils n'ont pas d'heures déterminées pour prendre les repas, ils mangent quand ils ont faim et ignorent ce qu'est un repas équilibré. Ils prennent beaucoup de café, mangent beaucoup de pain et de viande de porc, et les enfants se nourrissent surtout de bouillies de farine.

Leurs maladies les plus fréquentes sont la bronchite, l'asthme, la grippe, le rhume, les maladies intestinales et les problèmes psychiques.

Ce sont les enfants de cinq ans et moins qui sont le plus touchés par les maladies. Nous sommes arrivés à cette conclusion par l'analyse des ordonnances délivrées par le centre médical et l'hôpital, dont la plupart concernaient des enfants. Les enfants ne sont ni vaccinés ni suivis par un pédiatre.

Le niveau de scolarisation de la population infantile et adulte est bas.

Des 27 enfants d'âge compris entre 6 et 14 ans, seulement 14 allaient à l'école; on a constaté, au moment de cette étude, un taux d'échecs scolaires proche de 80 p. 100, ainsi qu'un niveau d'assiduité très bas.

Les principales causes de l'absentéisme et de l'échec scolaire sont liées à divers facteurs: le rejet des enfants gitans par la plupart des instituteurs soit à cause du choc culturel, soit à cause de leur aspect négligé et sale et de leur mauvaise odeur. Élevés en toute liberté, ces enfants ont du mal à s'adapter aux horaires, aux règles, à la discipline. Les parents ne peuvent les aider; l'apprentissage est difficile et long et les manuels scolaires ne sont pas adaptés à leurs champs d'intérêt et à leurs expériences de vie. D'autre part, les parents ont du mal à accepter que leurs enfants de plus de 12 ans aillent à l'école. Les filles, dès la puberté, sont l'objet d'une surveillance serrée.

Dans leurs rapports interculturels avec les organismes locaux et nationaux, les gitans se heurtent à deux grandes difficultés: ils sont une minorité ethnique méprisée et ils ont un très bas niveau d'instruction dans la langue portugaise. Environ 80 p. 100 sont analphabètes complets et 10 p. 100 ont du mal à lire et à écrire. Ils ne ressentaient pas un grand besoin d'apprendre à lire et à écrire. À la suite de notre action visant à les sensibiliser au sujet des avantages de savoir lire et écrire, ils ont manifesté un certain intérêt, qui s'est traduit par l'inscription de 23 adultes au premier cours d'alphabétisation. Mais peu après, ils n'étaient que 16 à venir aux cours. Ils occupent leur temps de loisir à regarder la télé, où ils aiment surtout les feuilletons brésiliens. Ils apprécient aussi les films indiens, d'ailleurs les seuls qu'ils regardent. Ils aiment bien chanter et danser «à l'espagnole», leur principale activité récréative. Ils prennent souvent part aux fêtes dans d'autres communautés: mariages, baptêmes, réjouissances populaires et fête de Noël.

Le «calo» est le dialecte des gitans de S. Gregório. Issu de la langue romane, il a une base de mots d'origine indienne et grecque, mais la plus grande partie du vocabulaire provient, en ordre d'importance, du galicien, du portugais, du catalan et du français. La grammaire du «calo» est influencée par le castillan, que les plus âgés connaissent. Tous parlent le portugais.

Leur langue est une sorte de tabou, puisqu'ils ne l'utilisent qu'entre eux. Ils parlent toujours la langue du pays avec les non-gitans.

La langue gitane n'ayant pas d'écriture, les communications se font par téléphone ou par contact personnel. Pour se mettre en contact avec des membres de la famille qui sont loin, on fait appel à des intermédiaires ou on utilise le téléphone public. Lorsque la communication, exceptionnellement, est faite par écrit, on ne s'y fie pas.

L'héritage culturel est transmis oralement, des parents aux enfants, au sein de la famille. Un dicton gitan dit que «ce n'est pas en parlant, mais en écoutant, que l'on apprend». Toutes les traditions sont racontées à travers des histoires et des récits instructifs. Les plus petits apprennent et retiennent.

Contraints de vivre au sein de cultures étrangères et plus évoluées, illettrés dans leur langue, victimes des soupçons et du rejet des étrangers, les gitans ont intériorisé la marginalisation qu'entraîne l'hostilité de la société due à leur différence et à leur condition de minorité culturelle. La pression continuelle à laquelle ils sont soumis donne lieu chez les gitans à une lutte constante pour la survie et les amène à créer des mécanismes de défense pour la sauvegarde de la culture d'origine.

Ces mécanismes et réactions se traduisent habituellement par des comportements d'agressivité, de méfiance et d'intolérance qui élargissent le fossé qui sépare les gitans de la société avec laquelle ils sont en contact.

La psychologie

La principale préoccupation des gitans est la subsistance.

Penser trop au passé ne sert qu'à troubler l'esprit, l'avenir est incertain; il n'y a que le présent, le moment qui passe. Le gitan vit au jour le jour. Dès qu'il éprouve un désir, il lui faut le satisfaire immédiatement. Attendre lui fait perdre tout intérêt.

Le gitan n'a pas l'ambition de s'enrichir ni le sens de l'économie. Il possède peu de choses, n'accumule pas de biens matériels, n'envie pas les autres. Il ne travaille que lorsqu'il a besoin d'argent pour manger. Il déteste le travail régulier, les horaires, les locaux fermés et les patrons qui cherchent des profits faciles. «Le gitan ne se salit pas les mains.» Les jeunes contraints au service militaire désertent, car ils ne sont pas capables de s'adapter aux règlements et à la discipline.

Le gitan a une intelligence pratique et une compréhension intuitive des choses. Il croit au merveilleux et au miraculeux et les accepte comme si cela était un dogme, sans aucune analyse critique. Il a du mal à fixer son attention longtemps sur le même sujet et aime les émotions fortes et les grands spectacles qui touchent son émotivité.

Il attache beaucoup d'importance à sa liberté, bien qu'il s'identifie fortement au groupe. Il ne se méfie jamais de l'autre, est généreux et partage avec ses proches tous ses gains. Il est bien connu que le gitan est toujours très reconnaissant envers celui qui lui fait une faveur, qu'il soit gitan ou «gadjé» (blanc). Il craint la solitude, il se réfugie donc dans la famille et le clan.

Il craint aussi la maladie, a recours à la magie pour tromper les démons qui la provoquent, et fait appel aux envoûteuses et sorcières (dont certaines demeurent à proximité et sont connues des agents du projet). Le gitan est fataliste: «Au-dessus le ciel, au-dessous la terre, au milieu les gitans.» Ce trait de caractère fait qu'il s'adapte aux circonstances, en ne réagissant pas devant les problèmes sociaux et en n'éprouvant pas non plus la plupart des besoins inhérents à notre civilisation. Le gitan est gai et vit la vie d'une façon passionnée. Il aime la vie et pourtant il ne craint pas la mort. Il l'accepte comme une force du destin: «C'est écrit.»

Les gitans n'ont pas de religion, mais ils acceptent facilement la religion du pays où ils vivent. Les gitans de S. Gregório professent la religion

évangélique prêchée par un pasteur et pratiquent le culte tous les jours, à 18 heures, dans un lieu destiné à cette seule fin (une baraque). Ils sont très superstitieux et nous croyons qu'ils ne font pas de différence entre la religion et la superstition. Ils acceptent de la religion ce qui leur semble immédiatement utile. La religion évangélique interdit certains comportements, tels l'alcoolisme, la violence, le port d'armes et la consommation de drogue, problèmes qui touchent surtout les jeunes. Ils ont cherché à vaincre la délinquance grâce à la religion, et ils ont réussi. Leur degré de fanatisme et d'assiduité aux pratiques religieuses oscille avec l'augmentation ou la diminution de leurs problèmes.

Chez les gitans, la notion de vol relève d'une mentalité primitive. Voler le «gadjé» (blanc) est tout à fait permis. Le vol n'est utilisé qu'en tant que moyen de subsistance, justifié par leur façon de vivre, leur aversion pour le travail régulier et l'insécurité du commerce. Le vol entre eux est interdit. La loi gitane prévaut contre la loi du pays et ses règles sont intégralement suivies: le respect de la parole donnée à ceux de la race, l'amour dévoué aux enfants, la fidélité conjugale, le respect à l'égard des vieillards, la fraternité, la solidarité et la préservation de la virginité chez les filles célibataires. La plus forte de ces règles est l'amour dévoué aux enfants. On leur donne toutes les libertés, leur procure la meilleure nourriture, les câline et défend contre tous les dangers.

La fraternité et la solidarité sont également très fortes, bien qu'il y ait souvent des discussions et des bagarres, toujours résolues sans qu'on fasse appel à l'autorité étrangère. Les gitans se protègent entre eux et font preuve de solidarité dans les moments difficiles tels que l'emprisonnement, l'hospitalisation ou les poursuites policières. Quand un des leurs est en prison, les gitans se rassemblent immédiatement, en grand nombre, pour le défendre, payer les amendes, les cautions ou pour témoigner en sa faveur. En cas d'hospitalisation, ils ne s'éloignent pas de l'hôpital, apportent de la nourriture et tout ce qu'il faut au patient et établissent leur campement tout près. La même chose se produit aux enterrements: certains viennent de très loin pour y assister et on se cotise pour payer les funérailles si la famille n'en a pas les moyens.

La loi gitane est très stricte à l'égard de la femme: pendant les fiançailles, en ce qui concerne la pudeur, la modestie. Le mariage de la jeune fille est décidé presque depuis sa naissance, et de la puberté jusqu'au mariage, elle reste sous la surveillance stricte de ses parents et de ses frères. La femme gitane doit se marier selon le rituel traditionnel, ne se marier qu'une fois et être fidèle à son mari, et, veuve, elle ne doit pas se remarier. Elle doit être diligente, avoir des enfants (la stérilité est une malédiction pour la femme) et ne pas montrer ses jambes et ses genoux.

La famille

La famille est un des piliers de la société gitane. Il ne s'agit pas ici seulement de la famille nucléaire, parents et enfants, mais d'un grand groupe formé de plusieurs familles nucléaires liées par la consanguinité. Cette famille élargie, c'est, en fait, le clan, qui constitue en soi une petite société. Les clans ont des liens entre eux, formant ainsi la tribu ou la communauté.

L'autorité à l'intérieur du clan augmente en fonction de l'âge. Ce sont donc les anciens qui organisent les tâches, donnent des ordres aux plus jeunes, prennent les décisions importantes. Le chef du clan n'est cependant pas toujours le plus âgé. Outre l'âge, il y a d'autres critères qui déterminent le choix: le prestige, la situation économique, la réussite, un nombre élevé d'enfants, et le fait d'avoir des liens avec le monde extérieur. Les attributions du «chef» vont des questions économiques et des relations avec l'extérieur jusqu'au règlement des petites disputes entre les membres du clan que les «batos» (les pères, les chefs de famille) n'ont pas réussi à régler. Dans la famille nucléaire, l'autorité appartient au père, qui s'occupe surtout des affaires à l'extérieur. Quand il atteint un âge avancé, il abandonne ses activités, qui sont reprises par ses fils.

Le mariage n'est pas le fondement de la famille, il n'est qu'un rite de passage de l'état de garçon à celui d'homme. Après le mariage, le garçon reste dépendant du père, il travaille avec lui, apparemment pour le rembourser des frais de la noce. La jeune mariée («la bori») appartient à la famille du mari et est soumise à sa belle-mère. Ce n'est qu'après la naissance du premier enfant que le mari devient en fait un homme et que l'épouse atteint la dignité de femme. On crée alors une nouvelle famille nucléaire.

La femme est soumise: célibataire, elle est soumise à son père et ses frères; une fois mariée, elle l'est à son mari. Comme elle est considérée comme débile et inférieure, l'homme a le droit de lui infliger toutes sortes de punitions. Le rôle de la femme dans la société gitane se reflète clairement dans la hiérarchie sociale: «les vieillards, les enfants, les hommes, les femmes et les animaux». Le jour du mariage, la jeune fille doit se soumettre à «la preuve de la virginité» menée par une vieille spécialiste en présence des mères de la mariée et du marié, de la marraine et de la vieille la plus respectée.

Le mariage est célébré selon un rituel traditionnel, à la tombée de la nuit, normalement pendant les mois les plus chauds, car on préfère le tenir en plein air. Il est l'occasion de réunir la famille au sens large. Habituellement, les familles des fiancés invitent la parenté, les amis, les voisins. C'est au cours de ces réunions que l'on discute et que l'on fait des accords longtemps à l'avance pour d'autres mariages. À l'heure actuelle, les gitans prétendent être libres de choisir leur conjoint. L'escapade est un

des moyens utilisés par les jeunes pour échapper à la volonté des parents; elle est traditionnelle chez eux. Les jeunes fuyards ne vont pas loin et ils reviennent chez les parents après quelques jours, ou même quelques heures, pour se faire pardonner. Une fois pardonnés, ils vivent avec la famille jusqu'au jour du mariage officiel.

Si apparemment les habitudes culturelles des gitans ont beaucoup changé, on ne saurait dire de même en ce qui concerne la tradition, la structure familiale, la psychologie et la vision du monde, qui ont assuré la continuité de la culture gitane, toujours sous la pression des sociétés qui l'entourent.

LA MISE EN PLACE DU PROJET

Les grands objectifs

Avec un minimum de connaissances sur la communauté et sur les caractéristiques de sa population, et une fois déterminés les problèmes et les besoins, considérés aussi du point de vue des gitans eux-mêmes, nous avons défini le type d'action à mener, tout en ayant présent à l'esprit le principe selon lequel les gens ont la capacité de changer individuellement et de participer à la transformation du milieu où ils vivent.

Refusant l'esprit de charité, nous avons choisi de provoquer chez les gitans une réflexion sur les causes de leurs problèmes pour leur permettre ainsi d'en trouver les solutions. «Si quelqu'un te demande un poisson, donne-lui plutôt une canne à pêche et apprends-lui à pêcher.» Cet aphorisme traduit bien la direction que nous voulions donner à notre action.

De leur pauvreté et de la précarité de leurs conditions de vie, les gitans sont conscients. Ils ont déjà compris que vivre bien, c'est quelque chose de plus que tout simplement survivre. Pour améliorer leurs conditions de vie, ils ne connaissent qu'un moyen: la mendicité. Cette solution les met pourtant dans une situation de dépendance sur tous les plans. C'était cette situation que nous voulions changer, sans les priver de leurs droits sociaux légitimes, en leur donnant les moyens de transformer ou, du moins, de modifier leurs «habitudes de survie», dans le respect de leur nature et de leur dignité.

L'équipe n'a pas renoncé aux idées que les gitans n'avaient pas exprimées au tout début, mais auxquelles, une fois sensibilisés, ils ont adhéré.

Les grands objectifs définis par la Sécurité sociale en collaboration avec les autres partenaires sociaux étaient les suivants:

— Permettre l'accès de toutes les familles à un logement décent, qu'elles apprendraient à utiliser;

— Mener la population gitane vers une plus grande autonomie à l'égard des services sociaux;

— Améliorer sa situation économique et les possibilités de travail;

— Équiper d'égouts le campement;

— Créer des conditions permettant une hygiène individuelle et collective minimale;

— Créer des conditions de vie acceptables par la communauté non gitane pour éviter la marginalisation sociale des gitans;

— Encourager une intégration des gitans dans la société portugaise qui soit fondée sur le développement de leurs valeurs culturelles;

— Diffuser la culture et l'idiosyncrasie gitanes;

— Changer l'image négative, stéréotypée, des gitans, très répandue chez les Portugais;

— Créer des liens entre la communauté gitane et la société portugaise qui soient fondés sur le respect des différences.

Les objectifs concernant la scolarisation étaient les suivants:

— Faire baisser le taux d'analphabétisme dans la population adulte de la communauté;

— Faire baisser l'absentéisme et l'échec scolaires;

— Encourager la participation des familles à l'éducation de leurs enfants;

— Favoriser un milieu scolaire souple et diversifié, soit sur le plan social, soit sur le plan institutionnel.

La méthode de recherche-action

Pour atteindre ces objectifs, nous avons cherché la collaboration d'organismes dont le type d'activités était de nature à nous aider à résoudre la diversité des problèmes posés, dans le but de faire converger toutes les actions en vue de la totale réussite du projet.

C'est ainsi que nous sommes entrés en contact avec la mairie de Braga, le centre de santé, l'Institut de l'emploi et de la formation

professionnelle, l'Éducation permanente, la Direction générale des sports, l'Association industrielle du Minho ainsi que la Sécurité sociale et la Croix-Rouge portugaise.

La configuration du projet comportait beaucoup d'éléments qui nous orientaient vers la méthode de recherche-action: elle concerne une logique de différence car pendant son développement on ne produit que les réponses à ce que l'on est en train d'étudier et non pas des connaissances que l'on peut généraliser. Cette caractéristique correspondait à la nature du projet, dont le champ d'action était petit et limité. Le projet centrait son action sur les problèmes sociaux dans le but de changer des pratiques, ce qui mènerait à une transformation des rapports sociaux et interculturels des gitans. Nous disposions d'éventuels partenaires pour l'animation-dynamisation de la communauté; nous étions conscients que les questions seraient soulevées et traitées au fur et à mesure que les problèmes se poseraient. Il y avait une équipe pour travailler au projet à plein temps. Il y avait quelques moyens financiers et matériels.

Mais la recherche-action est une méthode compliquée et exigeante qui n'était pas tout à fait compatible avec les difficultés et limitations que nous prévoyions. Elle nécessite une équipe multidisciplinaire comprenant plusieurs spécialistes (sociologues, psychologues, pédagogues, etc.) que nous n'avions pas. Les contrats avec les partenaires doivent être formels (on ne peut se satisfaire de contrats implicites) et nos partenaires n'étaient pas en mesure de répondre à cette exigence. La méthode exige que tout soit négocié au préalable et que chaque fois que l'on modifie les contrats, on redéfinisse les ententes et qu'on tienne compte des changements. Or, cela, nous ne pouvions pas le garantir. Elle exige également qu'on s'occupe en même temps de la théorie et de l'action, et nous étions conscients que nous n'étions pas en mesure de le faire. Elle suppose un grand contrôle, que nous craignions ne pas être en mesure d'assurer correctement. D'autre part, étant donné la complexité de la communauté, méconnue et marquée de grandes différences par rapport à l'équipe et à ses partenaires, nous ne pouvions prévoir le degré de participation des gitans.

Changer des pratiques sociales implique un bouleversement des mentalités et, d'après certaines expériences semblables, nous savions que nous ne pouvions pas prévoir dans quelle mesure il y aurait des effets négatifs difficiles à maîtriser.

Bien que conscients des avantages de la méthode de recherche-action: un plus grand contrôle des résultats et une plus grande rigueur scientifique, un plus grand engagement et une meilleure participation de tous, nous avons adopté une solution intermédiaire. Nous avons essayé d'en suivre les étapes et la façon de procéder, mais d'une manière plus souple et moins bureaucratique.

Nos guides méthodologiques ont été les suivants:

— Partir du vécu et du quotidien pour susciter la réflexion et l'engagement des participants, pour aboutir au changement fondé sur l'expérience personnelle et collective, ce qui exige la connaissance systématique du milieu/communauté;

— Fonder le travail sur la méthode de recherche-action, tout en accordant les étapes et les moments avec la dynamique sociale: principes, comportements et façons de procéder;

— Favoriser un type de participation (dans le sens du développement et de l'engagement) qui se traduise dans l'initiative et la responsabilité comme conditions d'articulation des connaissances (savoir), des capacités d'exécution (savoir-faire) et des comportements (savoir-être);

— Évaluer les aspects économiques et techniques, en prévoyant les moyens matériels (ressources humaines, financières, etc.) et les façons de prendre les décisions;

— Intégrer les organismes et services (publics et privés) en fonction de leur action propre dans la communauté;

— Tenir le pari d'un projet qui repose sur une diversité d'approches combinées (formation, création, récréation) et de moyens techniques graphiques, écrits, audiovisuels et autres;

— Mettre au point une action systématique (et systémique) qui dépasse l'activité pragmatique. Pour y parvenir, il a fallu maintenir l'équilibre parmi les niveaux de travail suivants:

  • l'action régulière et suivie;

  • le partage et la réflexion (l'évaluation) en ce qui concerne l'expérience et les projets;

  • l'étude et la recherche, base de la formation des agents, et la systématisation des matériaux et instruments nécessaires à l'action;

— Faire participer la communauté avec son organisation socio-économique, en tenant compte de ses racines culturelles et de la tradition comme source de référence à recréer;

— Favoriser l'expression et la participation (récréation/rencontres, recherche, création artistique, dynamisation culturelle, défense du patrimoine et de l'environnement, radios locales, sport, etc.);

— Développer la solidarité et la gestion sociale (appui à l'enfance et au troisième âge, aux malades, aux handicapés, à l'alphabétisation, etc.);

— Revendication (associations de parents, d'habitants du quartier, de locataires, de consommateurs, etc.);

— Faire participer les pouvoirs locaux et régionaux au développement;

— Viser une action décentralisée, autonome par rapport au pouvoir central, qui tend toujours à uniformiser.

Les stratégies de développement

Après la phase de négociations avec les partenaires, nous avons fait un plan qui ne peut être dit «concerté», car rien n'a été écrit et aucun engagement ferme n'a été pris. Les différents organismes se sont toutefois mis d'accord pour apporter leur collaboration, en mettant à notre disposition leurs moyens techniques et matériels, lorsque les actions mises sur pied respecteraient leurs règles de fonctionnement et de gestion.

Le projet a été organisé en trois phases, qui respecteraient la forme progressive d'approche où les réajustements et changements de stratégies sont toujours possibles.

L'Éducation permanente a joué un rôle important du fait de l'expérience qu'elle a acquise dans les milieux défavorisés, de sa capacité de mobiliser les gens et de les conscientiser, et en considérant l'idée selon laquelle l'analphabétisme des parents est un frein à leur développement personnel et qu'il se reproduit dans la vie scolaire des enfants. Un autre facteur a eu une importance fondamentale: une jeune éducatrice sociale de l'équipe avait fait son stage en éducation permanente, pour l'essentiel en alphabétisation. Elle était donc sensibilisée et préparée pour orienter l'alphabétisation dans la perspective de l'action communautaire. Pendant la première étape, elle a été à la fois l'éducatrice sociale et la formatrice du cours d'alphabétisation.

Elle a pu élargir son champ de travail en abordant des questions que les différents organismes n'étaient pas préparés à traiter sur le plan local, car cela exigeait des actions adaptées aux besoins très particuliers de la communauté: l'environnement, la protection du consommateur, la condition féminine, la justice (deux jeunes gitans de S. Gregório venaient d'être arrêtés pour trafic de drogue).

Pour que le travail des différents organismes ne devienne pas une série d'actions isolées qui resteraient sans suite, l'alphabétisation, en jouant

un rôle unificateur, y appuyait son programme d'apprentissage, élargissant ainsi son champ d'action qui souvent dépassait le domaine scolaire.

L'amélioration de l'hygiène personnelle, collective et alimentaire, la vaccination des enfants, la planification familiale étaient de la compétence du centre de santé, à qui il incombait également de choisir un médecin de famille et de sensibiliser la population gitane à la consultation médicale.

L'alphabétisation abordait ces questions, les travaillait et, tout en cherchant des stratégies interdisciplinaires, les approfondissait et y sensibilisait les gitans.

La mairie s'est attachée à garantir des conditions de logement, notamment en faisant construire quelques maisons ou réparer des baraques, en établissant un réseau d'égouts et en négociant l'achat du terrain où le quartier était construit, qui avait peu de valeur mais qui était propriété privée. L'achat de ce terrain faisait partie du projet, mais il revenait à la mairie de créer les conditions favorables à son acquisition.

L'alphabétisation a suscité la discussion et un débat élargi dans la communauté pour provoquer des attitudes favorisant l'action. En partant du cours, on a cherché des solutions, on a défini des plans d'action pris en charge par le «chef» de la communauté; on a rédigé des documents et des requêtes avec l'aide de l'animatrice.

On a aussi essayé d'établir un accord avec l'Institut de l'emploi (ministère du Travail) qui consistait à tenter d'obtenir un premier emploi pour les gitans qui venaient d'être alphabétisés et qui avaient leur certificat.

Le commerce dans les foires est de plus en plus difficile et nombreux sont ceux qui commencent à manifester le désir de trouver des emplois dans des métiers: électriciens, mécaniciens, chauffeurs, gardiens de nuit. Toutefois, cette possibilité leur est interdite dans la pratique à cause de la méfiance des employeurs devant l'absence de «tradition de travail» chez les gitans, devant l'attitude de ces derniers à l'égard de l'emploi (ils veulent un «emploi», pas un «travail») et leur bas niveau de scolarité. La seule possibilité qui reste aux gitans est de travailler dans la construction civile. Ils s'y essaient, mais très rapidement ils abandonnent, parce que le travail est dur, parce qu'ils le trouvent humiliant et «stigmatisant» pour leur race. L'Institut de l'emploi n'a pas réussi jusqu'à maintenant à répondre à cette demande et comme les gitans n'ont jamais travaillé, ils ne peuvent pas toucher d'allocation de chômage.

Toujours en ce qui concerne le travail, dans les cours d'alphabétisation, on a décelé le besoin d'une formation préprofessionnelle dans une perspective socio-éducative. Ainsi, les services de l'Éducation permanente de Braga, avec l'appui du Fonds social européen, ont favorisé deux actions

de formation de ce type: un cours de coupe et couture pour les femmes et un cours d'électricité pour les hommes. Le fait de participer à ces cours a permis aux gitans d'acquérir une semi-qualification professionnelle qui favorisait l'accès au travail, à l'égard duquel ils commencent à manifester une certaine motivation née des besoins créés par le processus de sédentarisation qu'ils sont en train de vivre. Parallèlement, les femmes ont appris quelques techniques qui leur ont permis d'améliorer leur qualité de vie, en raccommodant leurs vêtements et ceux de leurs enfants, et en faisant de neufs avec les moyens disponibles. De cette façon, nous avons aidé à améliorer le revenu familial.

Nous avons aussi créé, dans la communauté, un groupe de travail pluridisciplinaire nommé «Activités de loisir» pour les enfants et les adultes, ce qui, à son tour, a déclenché d'autres activités.

Nous avons défini comme prioritaire le travail auprès des enfants parce que c'est auprès d'eux que notre action pouvait être le plus efficace. D'autre part, ce sont leurs parents qui sont les plus susceptibles de changer.

Pour organiser ces activités, nous avons commencé par prendre connaissance des études qui ont été faites au cours des actions de «Soutien à la scolarisation des enfants gitans» menées par le ministère de l'Éducation nationale en divers endroits du pays.

Outre les difficultés pédagogiques, les plus grands problèmes étaient l'inadaptation de l'enfant gitan à l'école et l'incompréhension des enseignants à l'égard de ses différences culturelles, de ses habitudes et de sa psychologie.

Nous avons pensé à préparer les enfants pour leur entrée à l'école et à investir dans la responsabilisation des parents et la sensibilisation des instituteurs.

Le premier pas dans ce sens serait de définir les domaines où les activités devraient être mises sur pied. Pour ce faire, nous avons voulu comprendre les motivations des enfants gitans et déterminer lesquelles de leurs capacités devraient être développées pour stimuler leur intérêt pour l'école.

Les instituteurs qui avaient mené les études mentionnées plus haut ont formulé quelques réflexions et recommandations pour faciliter l'intégration de l'enfant gitan à l'école:

— Sensibiliser les parents pour qu'ils collaborent avec l'école;

— Créer des groupes préscolaires ou des classes de maternelle;

— Organiser des actions d'appui et de récupération scolaire, surtout au début de l'apprentissage;

— Développer la langue et l'expression orale en enrichissant le vocabulaire;

— Créer et appuyer des activités sportives;

— Organiser des cours ou des séminaires pour les enseignants sur la culture et les mœurs gitanes;

— Encourager l'alphabétisation des parents;

— Développer l'autosuffisance de l'enfant, surprotégé par la famille.

Nous avons organisé des activités qui pouvaient aider à résoudre les problèmes que connaissent les enfants dans leur apprentissage et dans leur intégration à la vie scolaire et qui étaient adaptées à leurs champs d'intérêt, c'est-à-dire à leur goût particulier pour la musique, la danse et le théâtre, pour les arts d'expression, où ils font preuve d'agilité et d'adresse, et à leur goût pour les jeux.

Les activités que nous avons mises en place ont été organisées pour créer, chez les enfants gitans, des conditions favorables à l'adaptation à l'école, pour faire participer les parents et les rendre responsables en ce qui concerne l'éducation de leurs enfants (et leur permettre aussi de tirer des avantages pour leur propre formation), et pour aider les instituteurs à comprendre et à accepter ces enfants dans leurs écoles.

Nous avons organisé des activités d'appui à l'école. Dans ce cadre, on aide les enfants à faire leurs devoirs ou on leur fait travailler le bois, l'argile et la paille. Ces activités, auxquelles ils prennent plaisir, développent la motricité et la capacité créative, ce qui favorise leur motivation et leur participation aux activités scolaires.

On développe également la langue parlée en traitant divers sujets (correspondant autant que possible aux sujets traités à l'école) au moyen de films, de diapositives et d'autres outils pédagogiques, notamment les jeux didactiques, les chansons et l'expression dramatique.

On voit aussi à l'hygiène corporelle, en apprenant aux enfants comment prendre un bain et en leur montrant les divers soins d'hygiène personnelle. On aide ainsi créer des habitudes et on éveille chez les enfants le désir d'être propre, surtout à l'école, ce qui facilite leur acceptation par les institutrices et les enfants non gitans.

Des activités sportives ont lieu toutes les semaines avec l'appui de la Direction générale des sports: athlétisme, hand-ball et football. En ce

moment, les enfants font des exercices de cross pour mieux connaître la commune. La plupart des activités se déroulent dans un camp sportif qui nous a été cédé. Elles sont dirigées par un animateur culturel qui fait partie du projet. Les enfants vont commencer à participer, déjà cet été, à de petits championnats et à des tournois.

Nous avons organisé des promenades, des visites dans les musées et les expositions, des sorties aux spectacles, au cirque, etc., dans des buts éducatifs et récréatifs. Les enfants sont allés à Lisbonne, la capitale, où ils sont restés cinq jours, pendant lesquels ils ont visité le zoo, des monuments, des musées; à Coimbra, ils sont allés au parc «Portugal dos Pequeninos»; ils ont vu le «Parque nacional do Gerês»; ils ont encore visité une usine d'objets en terre cuite, à Barcelos, une imprimerie et un journal en vue de créer plus tard un journal communautaire.

On leur a fait visiter une école professionnelle afin de les sensibiliser à leur avenir professionnel. Grâce à ces activités, dont on n'a mentionné ici que quelques exemples, nous souhaitions ouvrir des horizons aux enfants gitans, leur faire connaître le pays et son patrimoine naturel et culturel, tout en les divertissant.

Nous avons organisé des colonies de vacances au bord de la mer pour ces enfants, qui pour la première fois se sont séparés de leurs parents. Les premiers jours, les enfants étaient un peu désorientés devant la routine quotidienne, dont ils n'avaient pas l'habitude: les horaires fermes, l'hygiène, les repas réguliers et le fait de changer de vêtements pour dormir. Après deux ou trois jours, ils s'étaient adaptés aux nouvelles habitudes et tout allait bien. Cela a été le premier pas vers une plus grande indépendance des enfants à l'égard de leurs parents et aussi la première grande preuve de confiance totale de la communauté envers l'équipe du projet qui a accompagné les enfants.

Des semaines culturelles ont été organisées pour souligner les journées mondiales de l'enfant, de l'environnement, du consommateur, la journée internationale de l'alphabétisation, etc. Pendant ces semaines, les sujets étaient traités avec les enfants dans les «Activités de loisir» et avec les adultes pendant les cours d'alphabétisation. On faisait des travaux qui à la fin de la semaine étaient exposés avec les divers renseignements sur le sujet que l'on voulait diffuser à travers des affiches, des photographies, etc.

Nous avons organisé les fêtes de Noël, du carnaval, de la Saint-Jean, auxquelles la population gitane a participé activement, en accomplissant certaines tâches, en faisant des danses, des chansons et même de petits sketches. Bien que les fêtes ne fassent pas partie de leur culture, les gitans les célèbrent avec enthousiasme et joie. Ils assimilent des aspects des cultures espagnole et portugaise et les intègrent à leurs mœurs et leurs rites traditionnels. Notre participation à leurs fêtes s'est avérée très stimulante

pour eux. On a fait ensemble les plans de la fête, ils se sont organisés pour aménager les espaces à leur goût et selon leurs habitudes, ils ont préparé le goûter, avec l'équipe, ils ont mis en scène de petites pièces ou ont joué simplement des personnages, racontant un fait amusant de leur vie où ils ironisaient avec des blagues sur le «gadjé».

Nous avons organisé des échanges avec des groupes non gitans qui participaient aux «Activités de loisir» et nous avons encouragé les adultes à participer aux fêtes et aux activités organisées par d'autres cours d'alphabétisation, afin de favoriser les échanges interculturels dont devraient découler une vision plus juste du gitan et une acceptation réciproque. Ces rencontres, organisées dans une perspective d'animation culturelle, comportent des pièces de théâtre, de la musique populaire, des danses régionales, du folklore, etc. Les gitans, en général, ne se mêlent pas aux non-gitans. Pourtant, ils écoutent attentivement, s'amusent, rient. À la fin des rencontres, qui se terminent d'habitude par un goûter, ils sont plus détendus et ne peuvent résister à chanter et danser le flamenco.

Nous avons planifié, mais pas encore mis en œuvre, des activités de formation pratique en cuisine pour les femmes et en vannerie pour les hommes. Le cours de cuisine a pour but de montrer à préparer les repas au moindre coût. Le cours de vannerie a été conçu comme une formation professionnelle, dans la perspective de la création de son propre emploi comme solution de remplacement au commerce forain. Les possibilités de travail sont encore très réduites pour les gitans: sans scolarité, sans qualifications professionnelles, avec la mauvaise réputation qui marque leur race, ce n'est que très difficilement que les patrons acceptent de les embaucher. Jusqu'à ce que leur image s'améliore, l'«auto-emploi» est la meilleure solution pour eux.

Dans le but de renforcer leur identité historique et culturelle, nous essayons de créer avec enfants et parents un album de famille. Ces albums contiennent des photographies des ancêtres les plus reculés, des histoires, les récits instructifs qu'ils connaissent et qui font partie de leur patrimoine culturel et de leur tradition orale, que nous souhaitons valoriser et préserver. Parents et enfants s'y sont intéressés avec enthousiasme parce que cette activité est faite dans le respect pour leur héritage familial et culturel. Constatant l'effort qu'ils devaient faire, parfois sans succès, pour retrouver l'histoire de leur famille, ils ont compris l'importance d'enregistrer leur tradition pour pouvoir la transmettre aux générations futures. Faire ces albums est un travail très difficile, qui ne pourra probablement pas être terminé, puisque n'ayant pas de système d'écriture, les gitans ont perdu leur passé tout au long de leur errance.

Un séminaire sur la culture gitane a également été organisé à l'école primaire, pour toutes les institutrices qui ont dans leur école des enfants gitans. Nous avons constaté, une fois de plus, qu'il y a de l'intolérance

et de l'incompréhension à l'égard de la culture gitane, d'où découlent des comportements racistes et l'inadaptation des enfants à l'école.

Cette activité a constitué un effort de réflexion auprès des institutrices pour qu'elles comprennent l'univers gitan, en saisissent les clés et repensent leur comportement et leur discours pédagogique. Notre but était d'amener les institutrices à une pratique qui corresponde au milieu interculturel, en adaptant les programmes, en redéfinissant les contenus, en concevant du matériel pédagogique adéquat. On souhaite que l'école s'associe au projet de S. Gregório, tout en élaborant son propre projet scolaire, qu'elle organise des activités interculturelles auxquelles tous participent: instituteurs, élèves et parents, gitans et non-gitans.

Pour atteindre ces objectifs, on a fait appel à un couple de gitans qui ont témoigné de leur culture, de leur expérience concernant la scolarisation de leurs enfants et de ce qu'ils éprouvaient devant l'incompréhension de l'école à l'égard de leur situation socio-économique et culturelle.

Il faut mentionner la façon dont nous percevons les enfants dans le contact quotidien aux « Activités de loisir » et mettre en évidence le contraste entre nos impressions et celles de la plupart des institutrices. Les enfants sont très francs et, ne comprenant pas les hiérarchies, lorsqu'on les provoque, ils réagissent sous le coup de l'émotion (comportement en général interprété comme rebelle et effronté); ils font preuve d'une personnalité très forte, d'un caractère déterminé; ils sont intelligents, particulièrement perspicaces, mais leurs capacités sont peu développées; ils progressent normalement dans l'apprentissage dès que l'on emploie des méthodes adéquates; ils sont obéissants quand ils comprennent que les ordres sont justes; ils sont affectueux et manifestent des carences affectives (malgré leurs liens étroits avec leurs parents, qui n'ont pas de gestes de tendresse et d'affection à leur égard). Pour avoir leur confiance, on doit respecter ce qui a été établi au début.

Compléments méthodologiques

Il n'est pas facile de distinguer les actions qui s'adressent aux adultes de celles qui s'adressent aux enfants. Les deux étaient si liées que les adultes ont suivi les activités pour enfants et que les enfants ont suivi les cours d'alphabétisation pour adultes, en demandant de l'aide pour leurs devoirs.

Ce n'était pas la méthode que nous avions choisie, mais c'est celle à laquelle la dynamique de la communauté nous a amenés.

L'attachement à leurs enfants et le désir de les protéger amènent les parents à ne jamais les abandonner. Ainsi, d'une part, ils veulent

toujours savoir ce que l'on fait avec les enfants, et, d'autre part, les mères amènent leurs enfants aux cours et aux séances auxquelles elles participent.

Pourtant, nous pouvons constater que la méthode suivie s'est révélée positive, puisque le plus souvent c'était par l'entremise des enfants que nous pouvions contacter les parents.

Au début, nous abordions les questions timidement, craignant froisser les susceptibilités ou ne pas gagner la confiance des gitans. Ensuite, grâce au climat de confiance qui s'établissait, nous avons commencé à changer nos façons de faire et nos comportements. Nous avons compris que, souvent, il fallait être sévère, user de franchise, leur tenir tête, voire les «gronder».

Une conclusion s'est imposée: avec les gitans il faut, dès le début, définir les règles, s'y tenir et exiger d'eux qu'ils les observent. Nous avons également constaté qu'aux premières rencontres, le gitan, dans une attitude défensive, essaie de déjouer l'«intrus», en se montrant réservé et méfiant, et parfois même hostile. Cependant, lorsqu'il se sent en sûreté et en confiance, il offre son hospitalité de façon amicale et spontanée et, quand il s'est fait des amis, il leur reste profondément fidèle et loyal.

La méthode que nous avions définie au début n'a jamais été mise de côté. La nature et les conditions réelles du milieu où l'on allait travailler nous étaient à ce moment-là pratiquement inconnues. Nous étions conscients du fait que, au fur et à mesure que nous apprendrions à mieux connaître la communauté, ses problèmes et sa façon de réagir, nous devrions adapter ou changer les stratégies. Il était difficile de prévoir l'engagement, voire la participation des gens.

Aussi était-il évident, dès le début, que la flexibilité et la souplesse devraient être constantes et que nous devrions adapter notre action aux circonstances et aux réactions de la population gitane.

Diverses stratégies ont été utilisées, dont quelques-unes ont déjà été mentionnées. Nous avons utilisé des moyens audiovisuels, en choisissant soigneusement le type de messages et d'approche et des images qui pouvaient être facilement comprises et décodées. Nous avons conçu des affiches pour sensibiliser et informer. Nous avons mené des entretiens et des débats sous la forme de causeries avec des spécialistes des différentes questions à traiter. Actuellement, nous sommes en train de préparer un journal communautaire, trimestriel, qui sera un moyen de faire connaître la culture gitane ainsi que le projet et qui portera aussi sur des échanges avec d'autres communautés, gitanes et non gitanes, et sur d'autres projets.

Tel qu'il est conçu, le journal sera divisé en trois parties: une partie consacrée aux témoignages et récits de l'équipe, aux témoignages des gitans, à leurs expériences, à l'expression de leurs besoins et de leurs

aspirations, à des histoires, des légendes, des événements; une autre sera consacrée aux nouvelles qui intéressent la communauté et une troisième sera réservée aux activités des enfants.

Nous comptons sur la participation de toute la communauté, surtout celle de quelques jeunes gitans qui auront comme principale responsabilité le montage du journal.

Dans la mesure du possible, nous avons fait participer la population aux activités, soit par l'intermédiaire de ses représentants, soit par le contact direct avec ceux à qui ces activités s'adressaient. Nous avons défini les programmes avec les intéressés. En ce qui concerne les cours d'alphabétisation, l'organisation, les programmes et les méthodes utilisées, tout était décidé en accord avec eux. On tenait compte de leur avis pour le choix des horaires. Les femmes se faisaient accompagner de leur mari aux séances de planification familiale, les parents restaient avec l'enfant pendant les examens médicaux et les vaccinations et les femmes participaient aux actions sur le tabagisme et l'alcoolisme.

DES DIFFICULTÉS, DES RÉSULTATS

Quand nous avons commencé le travail nous nous attendions à avoir des difficultés à cause de la méconnaissance de la population gitane et de ses conditions de vie, de sa dynamique sociale, de ses traditions profondes. Nous ne pouvions non plus prévoir ses réactions à l'égard du projet. Nous avons donc démarré avec des préjugés, en nous appuyant sur une connaissance théorique et sur l'image que les gitans donnent d'eux-mêmes.

Des difficultés multiples

Tout au début et avant qu'ils comprennent la nature de notre action, leur premier comportement a été de demander, voire d'exiger ce dont ils avaient besoin; ils revendiquaient tout ce à quoi ils croyaient avoir droit et n'accordaient aucun intérêt au projet qu'on leur proposait. Il a été très difficile de leur faire comprendre que c'est sur eux-mêmes uniquement, sur leurs propres forces, qu'ils devraient compter pour assurer leurs besoins essentiels et améliorer leurs conditions de vie.

Cette tendance à demander s'est affirmée très clairement au moment de la visite du ministre de l'Éducation au cours d'alphabétisation. Lorsqu'il est arrivé, tous les gitans du quartier se sont précipités dans la baraque où le cours avait lieu et, dans une longue lamentation, ils se sont plaints de leur façon de vivre, de tout ce qui leur manquait, et ils ont dressé une liste interminable de demandes qui dépassaient nettement les compétences du ministre. Ils ont obtenu néanmoins la promesse qu'on leur donnerait un pavillon préfabriqué pour le cours d'alphabétisation et les autres activités communautaires.

De nombreux autres obstacles s'opposent au changement. Voici quelques-uns des facteurs d'ordre culturel qui nous semblent les plus importants:

— La tradition, dont l'influence est très forte, ne permet qu'une adaptation «utilitaire». Le contact avec d'autres cultures donne lieu à quelques changements extérieurs (vêtements, logement, nourriture) que les gitans considèrent comme étant d'utilité immédiate;

— Le bas niveau d'instruction et l'analphabétisme pèsent lourdement; on notera que ce sont les jeunes générations, qui sont un peu plus scolarisées, qui essaient de surmonter l'obstacle de la tradition;

— L'ethnocentrisme culturel: la croyance à la supériorité de leur culture. Par-delà la fierté de leur race, les gitans craignent que le remplacement des comportements traditionnels par des comportements étrangers entraîne une perte de la dignité et du prestige associé au groupe;

— La solidarité de clan fait qu'on se sent partie intégrante du groupe gitan et qu'on n'a pas le courage d'adopter des comportements individuels et de rompre avec la tradition, ce qui est considéré comme une trahison à l'égard de la communauté;

— La structure familiale est chargée de la transmission des valeurs culturelles, à l'égard desquelles toute tentative de rupture est perçue de façon négative et est presque toujours rejetée;

— Leur croyance dans la providence et leur manque d'initiative ne contribuent pas à améliorer les conditions de vie des gitans et leur situation socio-économique;

— La communication a été, au début, une difficulté dans nos rapports avec les gitans en tant que récepteurs ou émetteurs. Comme ils ne parlent pas bien la langue portugaise, ils ont du mal à comprendre les messages et à construire des phrases claires. Souvent, aussi, ils parlaient le «calo» pour nous critiquer, échanger leurs points de vue et même pour nous tromper.

À l'heure actuelle, ce problème est en partie résolu, puisque les gens qui travaillent au projet, bien qu'ils ne parlent pas le «calo», en comprennent déjà beaucoup de mots.

Cependant, d'autres difficultés extérieures aux gitans eux-mêmes se sont présentées: l'absence de procédure entre les services ne permettait pas de les rendre entièrement responsables. Au Portugal, les services

publics ont la plupart du temps un rapport vertical avec les usagers. En général, ils ne sont pas préparés pour donner des réponses adaptées aux minorités. Ils ont défini de grandes lignes d'orientation dont, étant donné la rigidité de leur organisation, ils ne peuvent s'écarter.

À cause de la diversité de ses domaines d'action et de l'importance de son rôle, la Sécurité sociale aura peut-être été la première à rompre avec cette tradition et à apporter sa contribution à la formation et à l'amélioration de la situation socio-économique de certaines populations. Elle met en œuvre des projets particuliers, trouvant des mesures pour débureaucratiser, rendre plus souples les règlements, créer des équipes de travail, réunir des partenaires sociaux. Voilà pourquoi elle travaille très bien avec l'Éducation permanente, dont les positions ont toujours constitué une exception dans l'ensemble des services publics. La diversité de son public, dont les problèmes et les besoins sont très différents, l'oblige à trouver des solutions et des réponses adaptées, que son organisation sait prévoir. Elle manque toutefois de ressources matérielles, humaines et financières pour répondre à toutes les demandes et à tous les défis qui lui sont posés.

La position de certains organismes à l'égard de la Sécurité sociale, de son fonctionnement et de ses normes, a été à l'origine de quelques affrontements idéologiques avec les équipes du projet. Ces organismes n'étant pas préparés pour intervenir sur le terrain, surtout auprès des communautés de minorités, leur manque d'expérience dans le domaine de la formation les amenait à adopter des stratégies qui parfois ne correspondaient pas aux objectifs des actions. Il y a eu encore le problème du manque de continuité des actions, qui se traduisait souvent par des réponses ponctuelles. Ces insuffisances ont pourtant été surmontées en faisant appel à certaines stratégies que nous avons déjà mentionnées.

Nous avons constaté aussi des divergences quant aux principes en matière d'éducation entre les formatrices des cours d'alphabétisation et les spécialistes du service social. Malgré la formation spéciale qu'elles reçoivent pour enseigner aux adultes et pour s'ouvrir aux réalités sociales, les formatrices ont tendance à reproduire le modèle élève/instituteur/classe, tandis que les assistantes sociales ont une vision plus large du contexte social et axent leur travail sur un rapport interpersonnel qui tient compte de tous les aspects de la vie de l'individu. Ces mésententes ont été facilement surmontées et l'équipe a réussi à fonctionner, en planifiant et en organisant en commun des activités.

Les règlements des organismes publics et la bureaucratie ont aussi été des obstacles au développement du projet, de même que le manque de ressources humaines et la diminution des appuis financiers.

Le fait de ne pas disposer d'un local acceptable, où l'on puisse travailler dans des conditions décentes, a été une de nos plus grandes difficultés.

Le cours d'alphabétisation avait lieu dans une baraque délabrée, mal éclairée, humide. On ne pouvait même pas exposer sur les murs les travaux ou le matériel didactique. Par manque d'espace, les gens s'entassaient autour de deux petites tables. Les enfants étaient assis plusieurs sur le même banc, et d'autres rentraient et sortaient, toujours accompagnés de leur mère. L'accès à la baraque était difficile, le chemin étant tortueux et plein de boue.

Les formatrices se plaignaient des mauvaises conditions de travail, qui se répercutaient sur le déroulement du cours. De fait, seuls une très grande volonté, un énorme esprit de sacrifice et beaucoup de courage ont permis la réalisation des activités dans ces conditions adverses.

Les premiers résultats

Il faut d'abord mentionner la construction d'un bloc sanitaire comprenant quatre toilettes et quatre douches, qui est maintenant terminé et prêt à utiliser. Le pavillon pour les activités est presque fini.

Nous pouvons observer des résultats dans les domaines suivants:

La santé

Les enfants sont vaccinés. À présent, les mères amènent d'elles-mêmes leurs enfants au poste, pour les rappels, et elles-mêmes prennent les rendez-vous.

Tous les gitans sont inscrits chez le médecin de famille et nous pouvons constater une plus grande demande d'examens médicaux, de consultations en ophtalmologie, stomatologie, neuropédiatrie et en psychologie. Des équipes médicales de pédiatrie viennent périodiquement à l'école pour y faire de la médecine scolaire.

Le changement d'habitudes alimentaires commence lentement à se faire: les enfants boivent plus de lait, essaient d'apporter un goûter à l'école et de prendre des repas plus équilibrés.

En ce qui concerne le tabagisme, rien n'est changé. Derrière cette habitude, il y a des valeurs culturelles très fortes. C'est en fumant que l'homme s'affirme, d'où le fait que les enfants commencent à fumer dès l'âge scolaire. Nous pouvons cependant affirmer que les gitans sont actuellement conscients des dangers du tabac et de l'alcool.

La plupart des femmes font déjà une certaine planification des naissances avec l'assentiment du mari et seulement après la naissance de leur premier enfant. Elles mettent de côté les préjugés et montrent une certaine ouverture à l'égard des méthodes contraceptives, même les plus radicales. En conséquence, on commence à constater une légère baisse de la natalité.

Le logement

Peu de choses ont changé. On a revêtu de ciment le sol de quelques baraques. On en a renforcé le toit avec du plastique.

Les gitans aménagent leur logement avec un plus grand soin, se servant de tissu ou de bois pour créer une certaine intimité.

Le travail

Là aussi, les résultats sont peu importants. On attend toujours la réponse aux demandes pour un premier emploi.

À une demande adressée à l'Institut de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle en vue de la création d'un cours de mécanique automobile, la réponse a été négative. Les règlements de l'organisme ne permettaient pas de donner cette formation à des gens ayant un aussi bas niveau de scolarité.

L'hygiène personnelle et collective

L'apparence et la tenue vestimentaire sont plus soignées et plus propres. L'espace commun du quartier est plus propre: les ordures ne sont plus jetées n'importe où, mais mises dans des sacs déposés à l'endroit prévu.

L'entretien du bloc sanitaire est de la responsabilité de la communauté. C'est au chef qu'il incombe de percevoir les cotisations pour l'eau, l'électricité et le gaz. Une telle chose était impensable auparavant; on aurait obligé l'organisme qui a fait construire l'installation à en payer l'entretien, puisque non seulement on ne s'en sentait pas responsable, mais on considérait que c'était l'organisme qui l'était.

L'éducation des enfants

On remarque chez les gitans un souci croissant en ce qui concerne l'instruction de leurs enfants. Cela explique le fait qu'il y a, en ce moment, de meilleures relations entre l'école et la communauté gitane. Les parents se soucient des résultats scolaires de leurs enfants et vont à l'école se renseigner sur leur assiduité, leur apprentissage et leurs problèmes. Cette pratique, que l'équipe avait amorcée, est maintenant assumée par les gitans eux-mêmes. Les parents, les mères surtout, font leur possible pour participer aux activités de l'école.

On remarque un changement dans la façon dont les gitans envisagent l'éducation de leurs enfants. Actuellement, ils cherchent à les détourner de la marginalité, notamment de l'habitude de voler le «gadjé».

La situation scolaire

Pendant l'année scolaire 1989-1990, le taux d'échecs scolaires a baissé à environ 25 p. 100. Au début du projet, ce taux était de 80 p. 100.

Pendant cette année scolaire, une jeune institutrice a obtenu un poste à l'école. Parce qu'elle comprenait le problème gitan, elle a essayé une nouvelle pratique pédagogique orientée vers une école interculturelle. Elle a établi un lien entre l'école et les familles gitanes et, en ouvrant le dialogue, elle a cherché à comprendre leurs habitudes, leurs conceptions de l'apprentissage et même leur façon d'envisager l'avenir de leurs enfants. Elle a réussi à créer à l'école une atmosphère accueillante, en rendant l'enseignement-apprentissage plus intéressant et attrayant. Elle a rendu l'école plus dynamique, a sensibilisé ses collègues, tout en créant un esprit d'ouverture et d'acceptation.

Pourtant, pour des raisons d'ordre administratif, elle a été remplacée à la fin de l'année scolaire et son absence a eu des répercussions sur le comportement et le rendement scolaire des élèves gitans. Cette année (1990-1991) on prévoit une hausse des échecs scolaires, qui devraient se situer à 50 p. 100 environ. Les nouvelles institutrices n'ont pas su poursuivre auprès de la communauté la dynamique amorcée à l'école. Elles sont mal acceptées, et par les enfants et par la communauté.

La sensibilisation qui a été faite auprès des institutrices, les activités en cours à l'école, le suivi des élèves gitans, un changement dans le comportement des enfants, une plus grande responsabilisation des parents peuvent renverser, d'ici à la fin de l'année scolaire, les résultats prévus.

L'alphabétisation

En ce qui concerne les adultes, la question se pose autrement, et une analyse aussi linéaire n'est pas possible.

Il est probable qu'étant donné l'attention qu'ils commencent à accorder à l'éducation de leurs enfants, les gitans se soient interrrogés sur leur propre niveau d'instruction et sur l'influence qu'il avait sur la formation scolaire de leurs enfants. Il est aussi possible que cette réflexion ait aidé à éveiller chez eux de l'intérêt pour leur propre alphabétisation dans la langue du pays où ils vivent et les ait amenés à se rendre compte qu'elle leur est utile. Par ailleurs, les enfants commencent à maîtriser, mieux que leurs parents, la langue portugaise.

D'autres facteurs sont certainement intervenus dans leur décision : la sensibilisation dont ils ont été l'objet, leur situation professionnelle, le besoin d'obtenir le permis de conduire, leurs rapports avec les divers organismes publics.

Un fait est certain. Il y a une volonté d'apprendre qui se traduit dans la participation aux cours d'alphabétisation, chaque année plus importante.

En 1988-1989, 16 personnes ont participé aux cours et en 1989-1990, 23. En 1990-1991, il y a 8 gitans, bien que 18 se soient inscrits. La formatrice a choisi de travailler avec des groupes plus petits pour assurer un enseignement individualisé. Les gitans exigent beaucoup d'attention, ont besoin d'être suivis et sont presque toujours à des niveaux d'apprentissage très bas. Des groupes très nombreux ne permettraient ni de leur accorder le soutien dont ils ont besoin ni d'utiliser une pratique pédagogique adéquate à ce type de population et à l'obtention de bons résultats.

À cause de leur activité professionnelle, les gitans sont souvent absents (quand ils vont à des foires éloignées) et leur présence aux cours est irrégulière. Ils abandonnent, pendant un certain temps ne viennent pas aux cours, et ensuite reviennent. Ils disent qu'ils «se fatiguent»!

Tout cela se reflète dans leurs résultats. L'apprentissage est lent, ce qui, parfois, entraîne quelque découragement.

Il est difficile de faire une évaluation quantitative qui traduise exactement les progrès et les réussites que, petit à petit, on constate. Néanmoins, on peut mentionner que jusqu'à présent 12 gitans ont obtenu le certificat du premier cycle de scolarité (correspondant aux quatre premières années de scolarité). En même temps quelques gitans ont appris à lire facilement et quelques-uns ne sont maintenant plus analphabètes dans la langue portugaise.

L'évaluation de l'alphabétisation doit être faite dans un contexte plus global où les résultats dépassent les aspects mesurables de l'apprentissage scolaire.

POUR LA POURSUITE DES ACTIONS

Trois ans après le début du projet, les deux premières phases sont terminées. La première, l'étude et la recherche sur la communauté, est un travail qui doit rester ouvert pour être réajusté ou amélioré. La deuxième phase, la planification et la mise en œuvre, est marquée par un certain désordre qui découle de deux phénomènes: d'une part, le conflit issu du rapport entre les caractéristiques ethniques gitanes et les défis et stimuli auxquels les gitans sont soumis et, d'autre part, les changements qui les ont obligés à une nouvelle structuration de leurs habitudes, traditions et comportements.

La troisième phase du projet, celle des transitions, sera marquée par un souci d'assimilation et d'intériorisation des savoirs, compétences et attitudes acquis pendant les phases antérieures. Nous voulons que les gitans évoluent et réorganisent en partie leur expérience en puisant dans notre culture les éléments qui peuvent leur être immédiatement utiles et qui favorisent leur adaptation aux exigences du milieu socio-économique dans lequel ils sont insérés.

Comme ils ne souhaitent pas remplacer leur culture par la nôtre, nous suggérons une amélioration progressive de leurs conditions de vie, qui préserve leurs traits culturels et leur originalité.

L'observation participante et le contact direct et étroit, pendant trois ans environ, permettent d'arriver à quelques conclusions. L'intégration du gitan dans notre société sera d'autant plus efficace qu'elle ne sera pas forcée. Cette intégration lente, qui ne se fera qu'à long terme, ne surviendra que par la prise de conscience des avantages et des exigences de la société dominante, que le gitan sera contraint d'accepter pour survivre dans des conditions convenables. Des expériences antérieures ont montré que les tentatives d'intégration des minorités de façon plus ou moins directement imposée ont provoqué la formation de véritables «kystes» culturels: des cultures statiques, résistant à tout processus de changement.

La motivation par rapport au changement sera d'autant plus forte que l'innovation s'adaptera aux valeurs culturelles et aux aspirations traditionnelles. Pour les gitans les motivations au changement sont, entre autres, le désir de prestige, la satisfaction par rapport aux conditions de vie matérielles, la possibilité d'améliorer leur situation économique, la possibilité de rendre plus heureux et plus sûr l'avenir de leurs enfants, une valeur sacrée chez eux.

L'alphabétisation et la scolarisation, surtout chez les plus jeunes, l'acceptation progressive du travail et le contact avec le monde professionnel seront des facteurs fondamentaux de leur développement et, par conséquent, de l'amélioration de leurs conditions de vie.

Par des chemins culturels à eux, en refusant l'acculturation mais en encourageant les échanges socioculturels, ils devront décider eux-mêmes de leur destin et prendre en main leur avenir. Pour leur permettre cela, il faut mettre à leur disposition tous les moyens nécessaires, conçus de façon réaliste: les savoirs, les compétences et les capacités.

Les changements sociaux et culturels devront être désirés, acceptés et structurés par les gitans eux-mêmes. Vaincre l'immobilisme devra donc être un acte désiré et volontaire.

Une évaluation d'ensemble permet de dire que les gitans, une fois qu'ils ont pris conscience de leurs problèmes et du fait que certaines de leurs habitudes nuisent à leur bien-être et à leur participation à la société qui les entoure, manifestent un désir de changement dans les domaines qu'ils considèrent comme utiles pour améliorer leurs conditions de vie. Ils refusent, toutefois, l'acculturation; ils s'opposent à tout changement radical et défendent avec acharnement leurs traditions, leurs idéaux de liberté et, comme toute minorité marginalisée, ils craignent d'être anéantis par une société qu'ils rejettent.

Nous n'avons jamais eu l'idée de faire des Portugais de race gitane, mais plutôt des gitans qui continuent d'être gitans mais savent mieux «se débrouiller» dans la société portugaise. C'est pourquoi nous avons toujours cherché à mettre en valeur leur expérience et leurs traditions, à respecter les valeurs essentielles de leur culture, notamment leur langue maternelle. Nous avons encouragé les manifestations de la culture gitane, en y participant chaque fois que l'on nous le demandait. Nous n'avons pas su, peut-être, abolir l'énorme résistance que les gitans opposaient au changement. Nous désirions un changement dans le sens d'un développement culturel qui rapprocherait les deux cultures sans accentuer leurs différences. Nous envisagions une intégration des gitans dans une société élargie qui se produirait tout naturellement, selon une évolution progressive de leur culture, mais nous n'avons peut-être pas toujours réussi à organiser l'action en leur rendant évidente notre préoccupation.

Tout changement représente une menace pour les gitans et ils se réfugient donc à l'intérieur du groupe, où leur ego social n'est pas en conflit et où ils trouvent un réseau social et affectif qui les protège des dangers extérieurs qui menacent leur solidarité, leur tradition et leur identité culturelle.

Dans ce contexte, les changements sont lents et parfois marqués par des régressions. Si, lorsqu'ils sont encouragés, ils ont le désir de changer, il existe une force culturelle qui les pousse à résister et à s'isoler dans leur univers traditionnel.

Ainsi, à cause de leur instinct de conservation, les gitans se trouvent en plein conflit: progresser et cesser d'être gitan ou ne pas progresser pour continuer d'être gitan.

C'est ici le moment de faire une critique concernant le manque d'équilibre qu'on a constaté entre l'importance accordée à la culture et celle accordée à l'intégration de la communauté gitane. Nous avons insisté d'avantage sur l'intégration, en oubliant, parfois, les valeurs culturelles. Certaines actions n'ont pu être situées que par rapport à la culture non gitane, ce qui mettait en cause un principe fondamental: progresser tout en continuant d'être gitan. Si tous ceux qui travaillent auprès des gitans

réussissent à leur transmettre ce message de façon claire et si les gitans le comprennent, ils se libéreront de leurs peurs et accepteront sans restriction les changements que l'on propose.

Malgré tout, il y a des signes évidents de changement, mentionnés plus haut, qui se traduisent dans des comportements encore hybrides, changeants, indécis.

Pour leur rendre plus facile ces changements, une aide doit être accordée aux gitans dès maintenant: il faut corriger l'image négative que nous avons d'eux dans notre inconscient collectif et les réhabiliter dans la société et surtout auprès des groupes avec lesquels ils ont des rapports. Faire en sorte qu'ils soient compris ou, du moins, mieux connus. Cette aide ne doit pas prendre la forme de gestes de charité ou d'assistance, posés dans un esprit de paternalisme et de bienfaisance. Elle doit plutôt être envisagée dans une perspective de promotion socioculturelle et de reconnaissance de la dignité humaine.

Un cadre de références théoriques et idéologiques systématise toute cette réflexion.

— La crise sociale en tant que (dés)ordre et défi d'où émergent des signes de changement progressif;

— La culture en tant que facteur essentiel de changement;

— Le principe selon lequel c'est chez l'individu que se trouve l'énergie essentielle au développement, dans son désir de satisfaire ses besoins de subsistance (l'amélioration de son niveau de vie) et ses besoins d'expression et de participation (l'amélioration de l'«art de vivre»);

— Les valeurs individuelles, le sentiment de la différence, la réussite personnelle, la liberté, la créativité, la justice et l'égalité, qui permettent des choix pour le développement personnel et collectif;

— Le droit à la «liberté d'action» pour adapter la pratique sociale à des modèles communautaires en vue du développement socio-économique de la population.

Compte tenu de l'évaluation qui a été faite et bien que nous maintenions les grands objectifs du projet ainsi que ses lignes directrices, nous avons réajusté quelques principes et quelques stratégies:

— Renforcer la relation interculturelle pour permettre de comprendre et de surmonter les contradictions, les conflits et les

désordres croissants qui sont inhérents à une minorité complexe et divisée, insérée dans une société en mutation rapide;

— Donner un sens constructif au tempérament revendicateur des gitans;

— Poursuivre l'action avec l'objectif de résoudre des problèmes ou de satisfaire des besoins pour favoriser l'amélioration des conditions de vie;

— Créer des conditions favorisant le développement des capacités de savoir/conscience, de relations/comportements et d'organisation/changement, et les considérer comme des objectifs et des résultats de l'action (le développement de ces capacités minimiserait le sentiment d'impuissance que les gitans éprouvent lorsqu'ils veulent réaliser leurs désirs et satisfaire leurs besoins);

— Développer la capacité d'apprendre, surtout chez les jeunes, en fournissant aux gens des instruments qui leur permettent de progresser dans leur autoformation et de s'acheminer vers l'autonomie;

— Faire appliquer les droits de l'homme dans les deux sociétés;

— Réduire l'importance accordée à l'intégration des gitans, en valorisant davantage les divers aspects de leur culture;

— Avoir comme objectif le développement régional et local à partir de la base, en ajustant, en démocratisant et en décentralisant de plus en plus.

CONCLUSION

Le suivi que j'ai fait de ce projet à travers les cours d'alphabétisation a donné lieu à une réflexion et une théorisation fondées sur le savoir mis en pratique et sur l'échange d'idées. Ce projet a donc été pour moi l'occasion d'un apprentissage très enrichissant sur les plans personnel et professionnel. Je mettrai ici l'accent sur quelques aspects de cet apprentissage. Nous avons acquis quelques certitudes. Ainsi, on ne doit pas commencer un travail de ce type avec des principes rigides, des idées préconçues, des certitudes, des plans et des objectifs qui ne peuvent être adaptés. La méthode de recherche-action s'est avérée la meilleure, la mieux adaptée aux particularités d'un projet de ce type, qui s'adresse à un public très complexe dont les caractéristiques, bien définies, sont très différentes des nôtres.

On doit investir dans la scolarisation et l'alphabétisation, en accordant la priorité aux enfants et aux jeunes, grâce à qui on peut se rapprocher des parents et de la communauté et qui sont ceux qui peuvent changer le futur. L'alphabétisation/scolarisation est fondamentale pour l'évolution des gitans, pour leur intégration socioculturelle et la capacité de comprendre la société où ils vivent. Elle constitue pour eux des moyens privilégiés d'adaptation aux défis et de réponse aux stimulations de la société moderne, qui connaît une évolution accélérée.

On assiste à une dilution, lente cependant, de la tradition gitane, due aux pressions auxquelles elle a été soumise. Si certains aspects des rapports entre les deux cultures ne sont pas modifiés, ces pressions peuvent mener à un génocide culturel. Malgré cela, tous les gitans vivent, au plus profond d'eux-mêmes, leur particularisme culturel.

Pour approcher les gitans il faut un minimum de connaissances de leur culture de façon à établir, à travers le dialogue, une interrelation dialectique. Le gitan a une vision du monde différente de la nôtre; il faut donc définir une stratégie d'action visant à mettre en contact les deux cultures, qui peuvent s'enrichir mutuellement comme notre expérience nous l'a montré. Dans l'élaboration du discours social, il faut tenir compte de l'information bilatérale comme facteur important pour éviter les conflits inutiles.

Tant que notre ethnocentrisme, si fort, ne disparaîtra pas ou tout au moins ne s'estompera pas, et avec lui le racisme, le rejet et les préjugés à l'égard des gitans, leur intégration sociale dans la dignité ne se fera pas pleinement. Il en faut finir avec leur marginalisation, favorisée par la résistance issue de la force et du dynamisme de leur culture. Face à cette attitude des gitans, il est souhaitable de promouvoir des mécanismes de changement qui répondent aux exigences et aux attentes de ce groupe qui fait partie de la pluralité socioculturelle de notre pays.

Nous considérons que les problèmes primordiaux se posent sur le plan des relations entre les ethnies. C'est pourquoi on doit poser les questions de développement dans les communautés gitanes dans la perspective de la culture gitane. Cette façon de faire pourrait peut-être permettre de résoudre certains conflits interethniques et favoriser le développement de la personnalité individuelle tout en respectant les différences et en en tenant compte.

Dans le cas des minorités, les projets de développement doivent jouer un rôle médiateur entre les communautés et les cultures, en favorisant l'acceptation de toutes.

La rencontre de deux cultures si différentes, la gitane et la nôtre, suppose un processus de recherche et d'action pour définir et concevoir

de façon nouvelle à la fois l'action et les stratégies. Dans cette perspective, il n'est pas possible d'élaborer des plans ou de prévoir des actions à long terme. Il faut plutôt avancer en planifiant par de petits projets qui seront évalués au fur et à mesure qu'ils seront mis en œuvre.

Enfin, et pour terminer, nous aimerions transmettre la leçon que les gitans nous ont enseignée: une culture n'est valable que lorsqu'elle réussit à unifier chez l'homme les différentes composantes de son existence, et lorsque ses valeurs et ses croyances y jouent, dans la vie de l'individu, un rôle particulier et primordial.

L'ANALPHABÉTISME: UNIQUEMENT UN PROBLÈME D'ÉDUCATION?*

Ute Jaehn
AOB, Berlin
Allemagne

* Traduit de l'allemand

INTRODUCTION

L'analphabétisme fonctionnel n'est pas seulement un problème de langage écrit: il comporte aussi toujours un problème relationnel. L'alphabétisation, c'est donc plus que l'apprentissage du langage écrit: c'est également la suppression des problèmes fonctionnels dans les relations.

Toute définition de l'alphabétisation, que ce soit celle de l'Unesco ou celle qui précède, a une portée restreinte, car elle n'englobe toujours que certains aspects du problème.

Dans notre société de consommation, dans laquelle on consomme aussi le savoir et l'éducation, le fait pour un individu de ne pas savoir suffisamment lire et écrire a inévitablement des répercussions sur sa vie personnelle.

D'un point de vue théorique, on pourrait formuler les deux axiomes suivants:

— une maîtrise insuffisante du langage écrit entraîne une faible estime de soi;

— les difficultés en lecture et en écriture se développent à partir de problèmes de la personnalité qui existent déjà.

Dans la question qui nous intéresse, l'ordre des axiomes est sans importance et ne relève que d'un choix de ponctuation arbitraire.

Dans l'analyse de l'origine de l'analphabétisme fonctionnel, nous mettrons en évidence des facteurs multiples. Un des facteurs analysés est la situation familiale. Cependant, nous traiterons de situations propres à certaines classes sociales en particulier. À partir des prémisses de la théorie des systèmes[1], nous allons attirer l'attention sur les relations familiales des analphabètes et mettre en évidence le rôle que peuvent jouer ces relations dans l'apparition des difficultés d'apprentissage (représentées par des problèmes de lecture et d'écriture).

Par la présentation du Groupe de travail d'aide à l'orientation et à l'éducation de Berlin (AOB)*, nous nous proposons de donner une description générale et abrégée du travail d'alphabétisation. Dans la deuxième section, à l'aide de trois cas choisis comme exemples en raison de leur fréquence, nous allons approfondir l'analyse des rapports qui existent entre les problèmes de lecture-écriture et la structure familiale. La section suivante est consacrée à étudier les conséquences de l'incapacité d'utiliser le langage écrit, dans la mesure exigée par la société, sur la personnalité de l'analphabète. Dans la quatrième section, où il est question des personnes qui aident les analphabètes, nous allons parler des contraintes qui pèsent sur les analphabètes, ainsi que des retards observés dans leur développement personnel. Enfin, la cinquième section traite des effets de l'acquisition du langage écrit sur la personnalité de l'apprenant et sur ses rapports avec les autres. Dans la dernière partie de l'exposé, nous essayons de cerner les aspects déterminants du concept que nous avons décrit et les modifications que l'on pourrait y apporter.

LE TRAVAIL D'ALPHABÉTISATION DU GROUPE AOB

Les adultes qui viennent nous voir à l'AOB ont déjà trouvé une façon de vivre en tant qu'analphabètes fonctionnels. Nous avons affaire à des personnalités très diverses, chez lesquelles il y a toujours, outre les conditions sociales particulières, des raisons, des espérances, des déceptions et des évolutions très personnelles qui, en fin de compte, ont conduit à des difficultés d'apprentissage du langage écrit.

Afin de pouvoir aider concrètement chacune de ces personnes, il faut considérer le vécu et l'unicité de chaque individu, sans perdre de vue les aspects qu'il a en commun avec les autres analphabètes.

Au cours d'entretiens d'orientation qui ont lieu entre la conseillère et l'analphabète, qui peut être seul ou accompagné par le conjoint, la mère, le travailleur social — bref une personne importante de son entourage — nous essayons de déterminer sommairement, d'après la perception de l'intéressé, les raisons qui ont conduit à ses difficultés de lecture-écriture, la source de motivation qui est à l'origine de l'intention de changer son état, ainsi que l'évaluation personnelle de son niveau de connaissance. À cet égard, les proches de l'intéressé jouent un rôle non négligeable. Il faut, pour bien comprendre le rôle des proches, faire un bref historique de l'AOB.

Jusqu'aux années 1982-1983 (l'AOB existe depuis 1977 comme association reconnue d'utilité publique), nous avions toujours mené nos entretiens d'orientation (counseling) uniquement avec le client. La séparation entre orientation et formation que nous connaissons aujourd'hui n'existait pas à l'époque. Tous les membres de l'équipe menaient des entretiens

* Arbeitskreis Orientierungs und Bildungshilfe e.V.

d'orientation et faisaient de la formation. Cependant, le participant a toujours été conseillé par une formatrice autre que celle qui lui enseignait.

Par la suite, les personnes qui avaient décidé de recevoir une formation chez nous allaient suivre un cours d'orientation d'une durée de deux mois. Dans ce cours, les participants avaient la possibilité (souvent pour la première fois de leur vie) d'échanger avec d'autres personnes aux prises avec des problèmes semblables aux leurs, de parler des choses importantes qu'ils avaient accomplies en dépit de cette «tare» (ex. : élever une famille, obtenir le permis de conduire, être parvenu à cacher son analphabétisme aux amis et aux connaissances, etc.), et de prendre conscience de leurs propres réalisations, qu'ils avaient jusque-là dévalorisées. Le cours, qui comprenait normalement de 10 à 12 participants et qui était dirigé par deux formatrices, offrait à celles-ci et aux conseillères la possibilité de comparer l'évaluation faite par le participant de ses propres connaissances et l'évaluation faite par les formatrices.

Après deux mois, un nouvel entretien d'orientation avait lieu avec le participant, au cours duquel on évaluait son degré de motivation, on relevait les changements qui avaient eu lieu et on fixait des objectifs précis. Simultanément, le participant était intégré à un groupe d'apprentissage composé généralement de cinq à six personnes et supervisé par une ou deux formatrices. D'autres entretiens d'orientation avaient lieu par la suite à intervalles de trois ou quatre mois.

À un certain moment, nous nous sommes trouvés devant le problème des «décrocheurs». Le phénomène s'expliquait de diverses façons. Nous avons été très surpris de constater que ceux qui décrochaient, souvent sans avis ni entretien au préalable, étaient précisément ceux qui, d'après nos évaluations, avaient fait de bons progrès et réalisé en quelque sorte une percée. Cette observation nous a incités à nous pencher davantage sur les autres aspects de la vie des participants et à observer plus attentivement les effets de l'apprentissage sur leur environnement immédiat.

Cela a eu pour conséquence l'intensification et la professionnalisation des entretiens d'orientation (par le perfectionnement des formatrices et des conseillères) en séparant l'orientation et la formation, et en faisant intervenir les proches du participant dans le processus d'aide.

Sept personnes travaillent actuellement avec l'AOB (trois sont diplômées en psychologie et quatre en pédagogie) : deux sont conseillères en orientation, quatre sont formatrices et une fait les deux tâches. Nous nous occupons de 80 à 100 participants dans les cours et les séances d'orientation, à raison de 175 heures par semaine. En général, la durée d'un cours de formation se situe entre un et trois ans. Les cours ont lieu deux fois par semaine, à raison de deux heures par séance. Le premier contact s'établit la plupart du temps par téléphone et souvent à l'initiative de tiers (travailleurs sociaux, agents de probation, amis, connaissances, parents, etc.).

Le premier entretien a lieu avant le début de la période d'orientation, le deuxième a lieu deux mois plus tard. Des entretiens complémentaires peuvent être demandés par la formatrice, le participant ou la conseillère, et ce pour diverses raisons. Par exemple, un participant peut vouloir discuter d'un problème relatif au cours qu'il ne peut aborder en classe, ou de difficultés au travail, ou alors la formatrice peut être d'avis qu'un entretien s'impose en raison de ce qu'elle a observé durant le cours. La même chose vaut pour les entretiens thérapeutiques.

Le participant a essentiellement deux interlocutrices: la formatrice, qui peut changer, et la conseillère, qui aide l'apprenant tout au long de sa démarche d'apprentissage[2].

Les formatrices discutent au sein de leur équipe des problèmes relatifs aux cours, et les conseillères échangent dans leur propre équipe leurs opinions sur les problèmes concernant l'orientation. Les deux équipes discutent des cas particuliers. Les conseillères et les formatrices collaborent dès le premier entretien d'orientation. Les conseillères fournissent alors des renseignements et des évaluations concernant le futur participant. Au cours d'une deuxième rencontre, qui a lieu après le cours d'orientation, les formatrices font part de leurs impressions aux conseillères, en se fondant sur les renseignements reçus de celles-ci et sur le travail effectué avec les participants. Les conseillères et les formatrices procèdent ensuite à un examen des objectifs qu'elles ont fixés.

Le groupe de formation est composé de personnes très diverses. Depuis quelque temps, nous observons une augmentation du nombre de personnes qui n'ont pratiquement aucune connaissance de l'alphabet. L'éventail va de ceux qui ne reconnaissent que deux ou trois lettres à ceux qui sont aux prises avec de sérieuses difficultés de lecture et d'écriture, en passant par les personnes qui font peu de fautes lorsqu'elles lisent ou écrivent mais qui ont un vécu difficile et souffrent de plusieurs types de dépendance grave.

La formatrice et le groupe

La tâche principale de la formatrice consiste à aider l'apprenant dans son cheminement vers la prise en charge de la démarche d'apprentissage et à élaborer avec lui un plan individuel d'apprentissage.

Le travail visant à responsabiliser l'apprenant présuppose un transfert progressif de la responsabilité de la formatrice à l'apprenant (ce qui suppose aussi que la formatrice soit prête à un transfert complet). Ce transfert de responsabilité se fait, par exemple, lorsque la formatrice ne souligne ou ne corrige pas les fautes commises par l'apprenant dans un texte, mais lui fournit plutôt une page dactylographiée (sans fautes) du texte en

question pour qu'il puisse faire une comparaison et trouver quels sont les mots qui sont écrits incorrectement.

Par cette façon de procéder, on atteint deux objectifs. D'une part, on sensibilise l'apprenant à ses propres sources d'erreur, ce qui, après une période de formation prolongée, le rendra capable de reconnaître les difficultés d'un texte et de faire des vérifications, par exemple à l'aide d'un dictionnaire (ainsi, la dépendance à l'égard d'une autre personne diminue et la capacité d'auto-évaluation augmente). D'autre part, on l'oblige à comparer des lettres, ce qui améliore sa capacité de perception visuelle et de différenciation. En outre, l'incitation de la formatrice à comparer les textes pour que l'apprenant puisse trouver seul les mots qui sont écrits incorrectement traduit une grande confiance dans les capacités de ce dernier. Cela est particulièrement important lorsque l'apprenant n'a qu'une très faible estime de soi.

L'examen approfondi du rôle du groupe d'apprentissage dépasserait le cadre du présent article. Cependant, nous tenons à mentionner quelques-uns de ses principaux aspects.

Souvent, les analphabètes ne connaissent pas d'autres illettrés dans leur vie de tous les jours. Leurs contacts se font surtout avec des personnes qui ne sont pas aux prises avec des problèmes de lecture. C'est donc dans le cadre du groupe d'apprentissage qu'ils rencontrent pour la première fois des gens qui ont les mêmes difficultés qu'eux.

L'image que les participants ont d'eux-mêmes lorsqu'ils commencent le cours est souvent très négative et s'accompagne d'affirmations comme «je ne sais rien faire», «je n'ai rien réussi», «je suis bête», «je suis un raté», etc. Au contact d'autres membres du groupe qui sont aux prises avec des difficultés semblables, ce portrait négatif de soi commence à changer. Le participant peut alors voir que les autres ne sont pas sots, qu'ils ont réalisé des choses, etc. Le groupe joue un rôle très important dans la modification de l'image négative et dans l'édification d'une image positive de soi.

Parmi les avantages que procure le groupe, il y a l'espace qu'il offre aux participants pour l'essai de formes d'interaction nouvelles et inhabituelles. Dans les groupes, il y a les loquaces, les silencieux et beaucoup d'autres qui se situent entre ces deux catégories. La tâche de la formatrice consiste non pas à niveler, mais plutôt à s'assurer qu'aucun des participants ne soit privilégié par rapport aux autres. Les conflits qui couvent au sein du groupe doivent être abordés par la formatrice et résolus collectivement. Il est important que chaque membre du groupe participe aux discussions, ce qui, au début, ne peut généralement être obtenu qu'au moyen de questions posées directement par la formatrice. Souvent, les règles élémentaires de la communication doivent d'abord être apprises (écouter, se

reporter à ce qui a été dit, etc.). En faisant participer tous les membres du groupe aux discussions, la formatrice contribue à la valorisation de chaque participant. Chacun a ainsi l'impression que quelqu'un s'intéresse à son opinion.

Nous constatons en particulier que les participants de sexe féminin pensent ne pouvoir apporter rien d'important à la dynamique de groupe et que leur opinion est sans intérêt. Avant que le besoin de communiquer par écrit puisse se manifester, il faut, entre autres, que le besoin de communiquer verbalement se manifeste et soit satisfait. À cet égard, le groupe offre d'excellentes possibilités.

Les tâches de la formatrice débordent largement le cadre de l'enseignement concret du langage écrit. S'approprier celui-ci, c'est plus qu'acquérir des habiletés et des aptitudes; cela comporte également un changement sur le plan de la personnalité de l'apprenant, et donc un changement de son attitude devant la vie. Jusqu'où l'individu peut aller dans ce processus dépend de nombreux facteurs, comme les relations, les possibilités de travail, l'environnement et la capacité personnelle de changement.

Les entretiens d'orientation

Comme nous venons de le dire, l'acquisition du langage écrit comporte non seulement l'apprentissage de la matière enseignée, mais également un changement dans la façon de voir le monde et de se voir soi-même, et conduit à un changement de perspective dans la vie. Cela peut entraîner de sérieux conflits sur le plan psychologique. Les entretiens d'orientation ont donc des objectifs très divers. Dans tel cas, on envisage l'utilisation du langage écrit dans la vie de tous les jours et on détermine le type de réaction de l'entourage devant ce changement, tout en planifiant d'autres petites étapes. Dans tel autre, l'entretien sert à assister l'apprenant dans des périodes difficiles et à l'aider à les surmonter. Les périodes de crise peuvent être déclenchées par une stagnation dans la démarche d'apprentissage ou, au contraire, par des progrès importants, ou encore par un changement dans la vie de tous les jours ou dans le comportement du partenaire, etc. En outre, toute sollicitation excessive ou insuffisante du potentiel de l'apprenant peut être détectée plus rapidement grâce aux entretiens.

La planification des objectifs pédagogiques effectuée conjointement par la formatrice et la conseillère en tenant compte de la personnalité de l'apprenant évite une mauvaise utilisation des capacités de ce dernier et permet de déceler et de prévenir les conflits, les oppositions, les refus, etc.

La méthode de base des conseillères est caractérisée par une vue globale de la personne. Les diverses méthodes employées sont issues de la psychologie individuelle et de la théorie des systèmes.

L'AOB s'appuie sur le principe selon lequel apprendre est une démarche qui dure toute la vie, et que quiconque peut apprendre s'il bénéficie des conditions qui lui permettent le mieux de progresser et s'il trouve son propre rythme d'apprentissage. Nous accompagnons les apprenants dans cette démarche durant un à trois ans. Afin d'éviter, autant que possible, que le participant oublie ce qu'il a appris et qu'il quitte la voie de l'indépendance, nous prenons en considération dans notre approche sa situation concrète dans la vie de tous les jours. Notre offre d'enseignement est aussi individuelle que les préoccupations de l'apprenant. Ainsi, nous transmettons des connaissances qui permettent à l'un de s'inscrire à un cours de recyclage ou d'accepter une offre du centre de main-d'œuvre, en préparons un autre à passer son permis de conduire, donnons des connaissances de base à tel autre pour qu'il puisse améliorer son alimentation.

Pour ce faire, il est nécessaire de collaborer étroitement avec d'autres organismes dans un **réseau de coopération**. Parmi nos partenaires figurent les divers services d'orientation et de liaison (aide aux toxicomanes, services d'aide aux femmes, services d'information pour les jeunes, les personnes handicapées, les étrangers; services d'information des bureaux de l'assistance sociale et centres de main-d'œuvre, etc.) ainsi que les foyers de quartier (*Nachbarschaftsheime*) de Berlin, qui nous adressent des gens ou auxquels nous en adressons.

Souvent, nous accueillons des personnes qui se sentent seules et qui voudraient bien avoir plus de contacts réguliers que ceux que nous pouvons leur offrir. Nous travaillons aussi avec des organismes pour personnes handicapées (cliniques, foyers, communautés d'habitation, foyers de transition); nous aidons les personnes qui fréquentent ces organismes en définissant des objectifs réalistes pour elles et avec elles, en collaboration avec nos interlocuteurs dans l'organisme.

Nous collaborons également avec les bureaux sanitaires (qui donnent de l'information aux personnes qui cherchent de l'aide, et qui peuvent, par exemple, proposer des thérapies) ainsi qu'avec le service d'aide aux ex-détenus, les centres de main-d'œuvre et le service d'aide aux familles, qui nous adressent souvent des gens. Avec l'approbation des personnes qui nous sont adressées, nous établissons, en collaboration avec les divers services, un plan dans lequel figurent le type d'assistance requis et les objectifs visés.

Nous travaillons aussi avec les responsables de la formation professionnelle, soit en acceptant des personnes qu'ils nous adressent, soit en dirigeant vers les établissements de formation des gens qui nous avaient été adressés.

Des échanges de renseignements concernant des objectifs concrets, leur planification, les réussites et les raisons des échecs ont lieu régulièrement dans le réseau de coopération.

Dans le secteur de l'éducation permanente, nous adressons aux écoles du soir (*Volkshochschulen*) de Berlin des personnes qui, d'après notre évaluation, sont en mesure d'y suivre un cours et n'ont pas besoin de notre aide, et ce immédiatement après le premier entretien d'orientation ou bien après la participation à l'un de nos cours (d'une durée variable). Si la personne participe à l'un de nos cours, nous offrons généralement notre aide pour les cours de l'éducation permanente durant trois mois, afin d'assurer une bonne intégration et d'éviter un abandon en raison d'éventuelles difficultés.

Nous collaborons également avec d'autres établissements d'enseignement postscolaire qui offrent, par exemple, des programmes s'adressant aux jeunes qui souhaitent terminer les études secondaires du premier cycle. Nous demeurons en contact avec quelques écoles ordinaires qui nous adressent de temps à autre des élèves des dernières années, afin qu'ils puissent bénéficier d'une assistance plus large que celle que peuvent fournir les programmes d'aide de ces mêmes établissements. Deux fois par année, nous organisons un cours de calcul en collaboration avec l'école du soir Schöneberg.

Enfin, avec l'appui de l'Institut allemand des bibliothèques, nous collaborons avec des bibliothèques (actuellement avec une seule) dans le choix d'ouvrages qui se lisent facilement, afin de faciliter l'accès de ces établissements aux adultes qui apprennent à lire.

Les organismes et services précités sont parmi les plus importants — mais ils ne sont pas les seuls — de ceux avec lesquels nous collaborons.

Le financement de l'AOB reflète la diversité des gens qui s'adressent à nous. Notre principale source de financement est l'Administration sénatoriale de Berlin pour l'Enseignement, la Formation professionnelle et les Sports. La loi fédérale sur l'aide sociale offre d'autres possibilités de financement. Nos clients peuvent en effet demander personnellement une aide financière en vertu de cette loi. En outre, il existe des ententes spéciales, comme celle conclue avec la clinique neurologique Karl-Bonhöffer, en vertu de laquelle nous nous occupons d'un groupe de handicapés mentaux.

LES DIFFICULTÉS DE LECTURE ET D'ÉCRITURE ET LE MILIEU FAMILIAL

Les familles dont sont issues les personnes aux prises avec des difficultés de langage écrit semblent être très diverses à première vue. Ainsi, il y a...

— l'analphabète qui a grandi dans un village avec dix frères et sœurs;

— celui dont la sœur a obtenu le diplôme de fin d'études secondaires du deuxième cycle (*Abitur*);

— celui dont le père était alcoolique;

— celui qui vivait dans une famille où il y avait de la violence et des abus sexuels;

— celui dont les parents sont également analphabètes;

— celui dont le père occupe un poste important dans l'économie;

— celui qui a grandi dans une petite famille;

— celui qui a été élevé dans un foyer;

— celui dont les parents n'accordaient pas d'importance à l'instruction;

— celui dont les parents accordaient beaucoup d'importance à l'instruction;

— celui qui a fréquenté des écoles pour enfants retardés;

— celui qui a terminé les études secondaires du premier cycle, etc.

En dépit de ces origines diverses, il y a des aspects communs à tous les cas précités: d'une part, le manque de compétence en matière de langage écrit et, d'autre part, des relations de dépendance, qui prennent bien sûr toutes les formes possibles et qui ont été favorisées par les difficultés de lecture et d'écriture.

Il est possible de distinguer plusieurs modèles fondamentaux.

La relation proximité-éloignement

Selon l'un de ces modèles, l'enfant grandit dans une famille où les parents n'ont pas de temps à consacrer aux enfants et où ces derniers sont obligés de compter uniquement sur eux-mêmes. L'enfant finit par s'apercevoir que l'un des parents s'occupe de lui lorsqu'il se montre incapable de faire quelque chose. Après un certain temps, l'enfant apprend à utiliser une lacune pour obtenir de l'attention. Souvent, c'est la vérification des devoirs scolaires qui sert de prétexte. L'enfant voit, par exemple, que lorsqu'il ne sait pas résoudre un problème, sa mère vient s'asseoir à côté de lui pour l'aider à trouver la solution. S'il était capable de résoudre le problème par lui-même, la mère n'irait pas.

C'est ainsi que prend naissance l'**orientation vers l'échec**. Même si l'attention de la mère est très négative (ex.: si elle s'accompagne de violence), il y a une prise en considération de l'enfant qu'il n'y aurait pas autrement.

Une fois ce modèle appris, il sera constamment utilisé comme moyen de s'approcher de quelqu'un et deviendra pour celui qui s'en sert un modèle fondamental de comportement humain. Même adulte, l'enfant qui a appris à agir de la sorte essayera de se rapprocher des autres en prenant comme prétexte son incapacité de faire quelque chose, établissant ainsi d'autres relations de dépendance. Dès lors, la possibilité de combler cette lacune de façon autonome et par un apprentissage n'existe pratiquement plus.

Exemple :

Famille d'origine : Père : Erwin, 52 ans ;

Mère : Hanna, 50 ans ;

Deux enfants : Sabine, 22 ans ; Hermann, 28 ans.

Nous examinons le cas de Sabine : elle est mariée avec Uwe, 29 ans, et ils ont une fille, Hilde, âgée de 5 ans.

Hanna et Erwin travaillent tous les deux ; ils ont un kiosque à journaux. Ils sont toujours pris par le travail, même à la maison. Hermann, le frère, avait toujours été un enfant facile à élever, qui n'avait pas de problèmes à l'école. Il a obtenu un diplôme de fin d'études professionnelles en électronique. Hermann attirait peu l'attention de ses parents. Quant à Sabine, elle s'est toujours considérée comme quelqu'un qui enlevait du temps à ses parents, et elle avait toujours l'impression de recevoir trop d'attention. Ainsi, elle ne se souvient guère de moments où ses parents auraient joué avec elle. Cette tâche revenait à Hermann, mais lui non plus ne voulait pas toujours veiller sur sa sœur cadette. Elle n'avait pas le droit d'amener des copines à la maison ; sa mère disait que cela lui donnerait trop de travail.

À l'âge de six ans, Sabine est entrée à l'école, où elle se faisait remarquer par sa nature tranquille et quelque peu effacée. On considérait qu'elle avait une intelligence moyenne, mais elle allait éprouver dès le début des difficultés avec l'orthographe. Sa capacité de compréhension avait été évaluée avec la mention « bien ». Elle a fréquenté l'école jusqu'à l'obtention du certificat de fin d'études secondaires du premier cycle. Ses parents, surtout sa mère, vérifiaient les devoirs des enfants. Sabine se souvient que la période des devoirs était souvent accompagnée de pleurs, mais que sa mère restait assise à côté d'elle jusqu'à ce qu'elle eût terminé son travail. Même lorsque Sabine eut atteint l'âge adulte et qu'elle eut son propre appartement, sa mère a continué de s'occuper de l'écriture, jusque pour la rédaction des lettres d'amour.

Cette situation a empêché que la fille se sépare de la mère et a assuré pour longtemps une grande intimité. La mère a pu ainsi continuer à se sentir responsable de Sabine, et Sabine n'a pas eu à assumer entièrement ses propres responsabilités.

La situation actuelle

Sabine a maintenant sa propre famille. Son mari est informaticien et leur fille doit commencer l'école l'année prochaine.

Actuellement, Sabine reçoit l'aide de sa mère ou de son mari lorsqu'elle doit écrire quelque chose. Il arrive parfois que la mère et le mari se disputent au sujet de la pertinence de leurs interventions respectives.

Après les études secondaires du premier cycle, Sabine a appris le métier de coiffeuse et l'a exercé. Elle ne travaille plus depuis la naissance de sa fille. Elle-même considère ne pas avoir de difficultés avec la lecture, mais elle fait de nombreuses fautes d'orthographe lorsqu'elle écrit.

Les raisons qui ont motivé Sabine à améliorer ses connaissances de l'écrit sont, d'une part, que sa fille commence bientôt l'école et qu'elle ne voudrait pas avoir l'air «bête» en tant que mère et, d'autre part, qu'elle ne veut plus se sentir aussi dépendante de sa propre mère et de son mari, lesquels lui font parfois bien sentir qu'elle a besoin de leur aide. Pendant l'entretien d'orientation, toutefois, on sent nettement qu'elle a également peur de faire ce pas.

Le mari et la fille sont présents durant l'entretien. Le mari fait remarquer qu'il tient absolument à ce que sa femme soit davantage en mesure de faire des choses seule, sans avoir recours à sa mère. Selon lui, c'est cette dépendance qui fait que sa femme et sa belle-mère sont souvent ensemble. Elle n'aurait pas à apprendre tout à la perfection, selon lui, puisqu'il est là, et que de toute façon, il vaut mieux que ce soit lui qui fasse les devoirs avec leur fille.

Il a été convenu que Sabine allait participer au cours d'orientation. Après deux mois, un entretien a été arrangé avec elle uniquement. On a également convenu que, par la suite, il y aurait éventuellement un autre entretien avec Sabine et son mari.

Évaluation — Évolution

Lorsqu'elle était enfant, Sabine se sentait rejetée par ses parents. Tous les deux avaient peu de temps pour elle. Cependant, ils tenaient à ce qu'elle réussisse à l'école. Si elle n'avait pas eu de difficultés scolaires, sa mère ne lui aurait pas consacré de temps, sinon très peu, même pour faire les devoirs. C'est ainsi que Sabine a appris à obtenir l'attention de quelqu'un au moyen d'une lacune, c'est-à-dire en se montrant incapable de faire quelque chose. L'attention qu'elle recevait n'était pas toujours positive, souvent même négative. Cependant, c'était quand même du temps que sa mère consacrait à s'occuper d'elle.

Plus tard dans sa vie, Sabine a continué à utiliser ce modèle de comportement. Son mari doit s'occuper d'elle lorsqu'elle a quelque chose à écrire, comme le fait sa mère. Les aspects négatifs de cette situation deviennent cependant de plus en plus insupportables pour Sabine: le fait d'être à la merci de quelqu'un, de dépendre de l'aide d'autrui, mais aussi la peur de ne pouvoir un jour plus compter sur l'aide de personne. À cela s'ajoute la responsabilité à l'égard de sa fille. Sabine ne sait pas ce que sera l'avenir et perçoit les risques qu'elle encourt à vouloir être plus autonome.

Au cours de l'entretien, nous avons fait remarquer à Sabine et à son mari que leur relation allait changer lorsque Sabine apprendrait à manier le langage écrit de façon plus autonome. Par la même occasion, nous leur avons dit qu'il existe un bon moyen de contenir ce changement, et ce moyen, c'est l'apprentissage lent. En apprenant lentement et en mettant en application dans la vie de tous les jours ce qui a été appris, Sabine peut être en mesure de voir quelle est l'attitude de son mari à son égard et si elle devrait arrêter temporairement l'apprentissage. Quant à son mari, il a également la possibilité de déceler rapidement des changements dans le comportement de son épouse et d'établir d'éventuelles limites par sa propre façon d'agir.

Cette approche a permis de dissiper chez les intéressés les craintes associées à un avenir imprévisible, de planifier et de maîtriser davantage le déroulement des événements.

Ce fut un chemin ardu pour Sabine, car aussitôt que sa mère et son mari se sont rendu compte qu'elle ne dépendrait bientôt plus d'eux, ils ont, poussés par leurs craintes, exercé une très forte pression sur elle pour qu'elle abandonne le cours de lecture-écriture. Sabine a réagi avec de forts sentiments de culpabilité, mais elle a persévéré avec l'appui de l'animatrice, des autres membres du groupe et de la conseillère. Cependant, pour en arriver là, il a été nécessaire d'avoir des entretiens avec sa mère et son mari.

La redéfinition de la relation de Sabine avec son mari et avec sa mère a été réussie. Dans d'autres cas, nous avons échoué et la conséquence a été soit l'abandon du cours de lecture-écriture, soit la rupture de la relation.

En l'espace de deux ans, Sabine a pu améliorer son écriture au point qu'il ne reste plus que quelques fautes d'orthographe tenaces, dont elle peut toutefois bien s'accommoder, et qu'elle n'a plus besoin de demander d'aide.

La relation de substitut du partenaire

Un autre modèle fondamental est celui où l'enfant apprend à exprimer de l'attachement par l'identification à un membre de la famille et en même temps par une distanciation vis-à-vis d'un autre de ses membres. On rencontre souvent ce modèle dans des familles où il y a de la violence. Les faibles se solidarisent contre les personnes violentes à travers leur présumée faiblesse. Dans l'exemple de Klaus, décrit ci-après, la situation familiale a conduit à une problématique de l'identité.

Exemple:

Famille d'origine: Père: ouvrier sans qualification professionnelle, alcoolique, 60 ans;

Mère: ménagère et femme de ménage, 54 ans;

Huit enfants: Lisa, 38 ans; Kurt, 36; Hans, 35; Klaus, 33; Paula, 30; Anna, 27; Heike, 25; Susanne, 20.

Klaus s'est toujours senti attiré vers sa mère. Il n'a jamais vraiment compris ni son père, ni ses frères, Hans et Kurt. C'est avec Lisa qu'il s'entendait le mieux. Quant à Susanne, il a toujours dû veiller sur elle. Il est entré à l'école primaire à l'âge de six ans. Deux ans plus tard, il a été transféré dans une école pour enfants retardés; il ne se souvient pas qui avait décidé du transfert. À l'exception des activités sportives, l'école ne lui plaisait pas. Il n'y allait pas volontiers, était souvent absent, mais ne se faisait pas remarquer par son comportement, au contraire, il passait inaperçu. À la maison, les parents ne regardaient jamais les devoirs. Ses frères et sœurs aînés ne l'aidaient pas non plus. Il ne sait d'ailleurs pas si eux-mêmes faisaient des devoirs. Lisa n'avait sans doute pas eu de difficultés de lecture et d'écriture, mais Kurt, Anna et Heike en ont eu comme lui, Klaus en est certain. Le père savait lire et écrire. La mère avait des difficultés; elle ne reconnaissait que quelques lettres de l'alphabet et ne savait écrire que son nom. Il a toujours plaint sa mère, que son père battait souvent lorsqu'il était ivre, en lui disant qu'elle était bête. Il a dû souvent protéger sa mère, mais il pense avoir fait trop peu pour elle. À un certain moment, sa mère a finalement quitté son mari.

Situation actuelle

Klaus n'a plus aucun contact avec son père; il rend régulièrement visite à sa mère. Il habite seul maintenant. Il parvient à lire, de façon laborieuse, mais il est capable de retirer de l'information d'un texte. La transcription ne constitue pas un problème, mais lorsqu'il écrit sans l'aide de personne, il commet tellement de fautes (transpositions, omissions,

majuscules / minuscules) que les mots en deviennent incompréhensibles. Pendant les entretiens d'orientation, Klaus n'éprouve aucune difficulté de compréhension ; il comprend les liens du discours et sait s'exprimer de façon cohérente.

Klaus a travaillé longtemps comme manœuvre dans l'industrie du bâtiment avant de devenir chômeur. Le centre de main-d'œuvre lui a proposé récemment de faire un apprentissage de maçon. Cependant, au cours d'un cours préparatoire, on a remarqué sa mauvaise maîtrise de l'allemand. S'il ne parvient pas à combler cette lacune, il ne réussira pas à terminer l'apprentissage. Dans la vie de tous les jours, Klaus évite les situations dans lesquelles il doit lire ou écrire en présence de quelqu'un. Lorsque de telles situations deviennent inévitables, il lui arrive souvent d'avoir des sueurs, par exemple lorsqu'il vient remplir un mandat de paiement au guichet de la poste. Il a peur que les gens voient qu'il est en sueur et qu'ils en concluent que quelque chose ne va pas chez lui, ou que l'employé des postes lui fasse remarquer qu'il a mal écrit quelque chose.

Évaluation — Évolution

Au début, Klaus était très craintif, réservé ; il transpirait et se tordait les mains.

Sa mère, à laquelle il est toujours lié par une relation très étroite, avait pour lui une importance primordiale lorsqu'il était enfant. Il lui était impossible de s'identifier à son père, qui buvait et était violent. Mais les enfants appartenant à des familles structurées ainsi ne connaissent pas nécessairement des difficultés sur le plan du langage écrit. Plusieurs explications différentes doivent donc être considérées.

Dans cette famille, on se préoccupait peu d'éducation, et pourtant quelques frères et sœurs n'ont pas connu de difficultés de lecture et d'écriture, ou très peu. Comment se fait-il, alors, que Klaus ait connu, lui, de telles difficultés ? Nous émettons l'hypothèse que Klaus a essayé de se mettre au niveau de sa mère par le biais de ses problèmes de langage écrit, afin de lui apporter son appui. Des problèmes relationnels ont surgi par la suite entre Klaus et sa mère, à mesure qu'il apprenait à lire et à écrire.

Klaus a suivi notre cours d'orientation, et après deux mois, nous l'avons invité à un entretien en compagnie de sa mère. Au cours du travail ultérieur avec les deux, nous avons constaté que la pire crainte de Klaus était de devenir comme son père. À ses yeux, apprendre équivalait à abandonner sa mère. Celle-ci, en revanche, craignait d'être responsable des connaissances insuffisantes de son fils sur le plan du langage écrit, du fait qu'elle l'avait toujours gardé à ses côtés. Il était son confident dans la famille.

La frontière entre les générations avait été effacée dans cette famille, et Klaus n'était plus seulement le fils, il était aussi le substitut du partenaire pour la mère. Encore récemment, c'était Klaus qui s'occupait le plus de sa mère et qui lui rendait visite le plus souvent. Celle-ci menait une vie très solitaire et n'avait pas de cercle d'amis. Elle orientait ses occupations en fonction des visites de son fils. Ces visites étaient pour elle des rayons de soleil.

Pendant l'entretien, madame B. donnait l'impression d'être déprimée. À notre avis, on ne pouvait aider le fils que dans la mesure où la mère trouvait plus d'énergie et plus d'intérêt pour sa propre personne. Alors seulement serait-elle en mesure de laisser son fils vivre sa propre vie.

Au cours de quelques entretiens conduits individuellement avec la mère, entretiens échelonnés sur une période de six mois et au cours desquels elle a pu d'abord parler de ses souffrances et de ses déceptions (c'était la première fois de sa vie qu'elle se confiait à quelqu'un), il a été possible de définir avec elle quelques objectifs mineurs.

D'une part, elle se sentait blessée par sa dépendance vis-à-vis du bureau de l'assistance sociale et, d'autre part, elle appréciait bien l'aide qu'elle recevait. Elle s'était fixé comme but de chercher un emploi de quelques heures par semaine comme femme de ménage, afin de ne plus devoir compter autant sur l'aide sociale. On a également constaté qu'elle s'intéressait beaucoup au travail manuel, mais qu'elle n'avait pas le courage et l'énergie d'en faire.

Madame B. devait suivre timidement un cours de poterie à l'école du soir, et elle a été étonnée de sa propre habileté et du plaisir que lui procurait cette activité. Elle allait aussi trouver un travail de quelques heures par semaine comme femme de ménage. Plus tard, elle a été en mesure de travailler davantage. Aujourd'hui (après deux ans et demi), madame B. travaille comme membre actif des «Panthères grises» et donne l'impression d'être bien dans sa peau.

Klaus a connu un véritable effondrement lorsque sa mère a commencé à devenir plus indépendante. Il craignait de perdre la relation qu'il avait avec elle et la pressait d'arrêter ses activités. Madame B. a également redouté de perdre son fils. Cependant, grâce à un travail commun mené durant un certain temps avec les deux, le fils a trouvé assez de confiance dans la stabilité des rapports existant entre lui et sa mère, et tous les deux ont été en mesure de poursuivre la relation avec plus de maturité.

En redoublant d'effort dans les exercices, et grâce à son grand désir d'apprendre (et à l'habileté acquise entre-temps), Klaus a réussi à ne plus avoir de sueurs lorsqu'il doit écrire quelque chose devant quelqu'un. Il est donc beaucoup plus sûr de lui et n'éprouve plus de difficultés quand il

lit. Toutefois, lorsqu'il écrit, il transpose et confond encore certains mots. En outre, il est sur le point de terminer avec succès son apprentissage de maçon, et il s'est lié d'amitié depuis quelque temps déjà avec une femme qu'il a rencontrée au travail.

La relation de cohésion

Un autre modèle fondamental de comportement est celui dans lequel l'enfant est le lien qui unit les parents, c'est-à-dire qu'il assume la responsabilité de la cohésion et du bon fonctionnement de la famille. On rencontre souvent cette situation dans les familles dont les parents sont ensemble uniquement parce qu'ils veulent un enfant, et qui auraient tendance à se séparer si leur souhait ne se réalisait pas.

Dans une telle situation, l'enfant est exposé à d'énormes exigences sur le plan émotif, qui dépassent bien sûr largement ses capacités. Il doit être un enfant que l'on peut «montrer» aux autres et qui va réussir, et il doit également rester autant que possible auprès de ses parents, afin que ceux-ci ne soient pas seuls avec leurs problèmes et n'aient pas l'occasion de se disputer. Malgré tout, les parents ne veulent que le bien de leur enfant.

Ces enfants éprouvent de grandes difficultés à garder une distance par rapport à leurs parents et à établir une frontière entre ces derniers et eux-mêmes, parce qu'ils sont constamment menacés par un empiétement sur leur «territoire» et des sollicitations de la part de parents qui ne respectent pas la frontière des générations. Ces enfants n'ont souvent d'autre recours que des comportements extrêmes pour établir des limites, puisque les autres moyens ne sont pas efficaces.

Exemple:

Famille d'origine: Père: employé de banque, 58 ans;
Mère: ménagère, 55 ans;
Un enfant: Theo, 18 ans.

Theo est considéré comme un handicapé mental léger et souffre d'une névrodermite depuis sa tendre enfance. Il était un enfant tout à fait désiré; les deux parents avaient fondé de grands espoirs sur le nouveau-né, qui devait absolument être un garçon.

La mère est présente pendant l'entretien d'orientation. Il existe de grandes déceptions du côté des parents au sujet de leur fils. Theo a fréquenté une école pour enfants retardés, où son comportement a toujours attiré l'attention. Par exemple, il renversait des chaises, parvenait difficilement à se concentrer et faisait le clown.

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Entre Theo et son père, les choses n'allaient pas du tout ; le père aurait été trop déçu par le fait que Theo ne faisait aucun progrès.

Situation actuelle

Durant l'entretien d'orientation, Theo s'efforce de donner l'impression qu'il s'ennuie. La mère souhaite que son fils apprenne quelque chose, car elle se demande ce qu'il deviendra lorsque ses parents ne seront plus là.

Theo habite encore chez ses parents, où il a une petite chambre. Il connaît toutes les lettres de l'alphabet, mais il a de la difficulté à différencier les sons. Avec beaucoup d'effort, il réussit à réunir des lettres, mais sans en comprendre la signification. Il est en mesure d'écrire son nom et son prénom en majuscules. Il ne sait pas écrire son adresse. Nous convenons au cours de l'entretien que d'apprendre à écrire son adresse pourrait être un but à atteindre.

Il a aussi été convenu que Theo participe au cours d'orientation, tout en assistant à des entretiens d'orientation à intervalles réguliers, conduits avec Theo uniquement, mais parfois avec lui et ses parents.

Évaluation — Évolution

Theo a été conçu relativement tard. Le couple C. a vécu longtemps sans enfant. Au moment de la naissance du fils, madame C. avait 37 ans, monsieur C. 40. Au cours des entretiens d'orientation, on a constaté que tous les deux ont eu comme but principal dans la vie d'élever leur enfant, et qu'ils espéraient se rapprocher l'un de l'autre grâce à leur enfant. Avant la naissance de leur fils, les deux conjoints n'avaient plus grand-chose à se dire ; il n'y avait plus de vie commune. Monsieur C. se consacrait entièrement à son travail, madame C. travaillait bénévolement pour la paroisse. Leurs espoirs étaient fondés sur leur fils. Theo est né prématurément et a dû rester quelque temps dans l'incubateur. Il était encore nourrisson quand il a été atteint d'une névrodermite. Dès le début, il a nécessité beaucoup de soins. Par la suite, il y a eu d'autres soucis : Theo ne montrait pas d'intérêt à l'école et préférait jouer ou, plus tard, aller dans les discothèques. Il a grandi dans un milieu très protégé, mais n'avait pas de sphère d'intimité. À cause de sa névrodermite, ses parents pouvaient entrer dans sa chambre à n'importe quelle heure du jour ou de la nuit, car ils craignaient que son affection n'ait empiré et que l'enfant ne se gratte jusqu'au sang.

D'autre part, Theo était tout à fait conscient des avantages que comportait sa situation. Il avait fait l'expérience qu'il pouvait facilement influencer ses parents et en tirait profit. Ses parents étaient très inquiets au sujet de son développement et essayaient tous les moyens imaginables pour l'aider (instituteur privé, etc.). Les deux conjoints avaient maintenant beaucoup

de choses à se dire, et cela leur a fait oublier qu'ils avaient des problèmes en tant que couple avant la naissance de leur fils. Celui-ci était incapable de prendre des décisions, même lorsqu'il s'agissait des vêtements qu'il devait mettre. Ses parents décidaient tout ce qu'il devait faire. Sa participation à un cours de lecture-écriture avait également été décidée par ses parents. Au début, il n'était pas vraiment intéressé à apprendre. Ce qui l'intéressait, c'était les autres membres du groupe, avec lesquels il parlait de lui-même et de ses cassettes préférées.

Afin de réagir contre l'influence de ses parents et d'établir une certaine distance, Theo a rejeté leur proposition en leur montrant que le cours était un échec. Durant le cours, donc, il n'arrivait tout simplement pas à se concentrer. Maintenir ses parents à une certaine distance, ce qui lui aurait permis d'évoluer, lui était particulièrement difficile, car ceux-ci l'attendaient impatiemment et qu'en plus ils s'occupaient de lui avec beaucoup de gentillesse. Theo ne pouvait pas courir le risque de les blesser en persistant dans son intention de les écarter davantage de sa vie. Il bénéficiait de toute l'attention, autant négative que positive. Il n'était pas à la hauteur de la tâche que ses parents lui avaient inconsciemment assignée. S'il devenait le fils qu'ils souhaitaient avoir, il les blesserait et devrait les quitter. Ils seraient alors de nouveau seuls avec eux-mêmes. La maladie de Theo et le fait qu'il était un enfant difficile à élever ont gardé les conjoints ensemble.

Dans le cours, Theo démontrait, par son absence d'intérêt, qu'il était là parce qu'il voulait/devait faire plaisir à ses parents. Dans ces circonstances, il se privait de toute chance d'apprendre. Le combat entre lui et ses parents pour le pouvoir décisionnel avait été porté sur le plan de l'apprentissage du langage écrit.

J'ai conduit un entretien d'orientation individuel avec Theo, au cours duquel je lui ai décrit ce problème. Theo a été soulagé de voir qu'il avait été compris. Nous avons décidé que moi-même et sa formatrice allions nous entretenir avec ses parents. J'ai aussi convenu avec Theo qu'il interrompe ses cours durant deux mois et qu'il utilise cette période pour dresser une liste des choses qui lui plaisaient et de celles qui lui plaisaient moins (il voulait faire des dessins de ces choses). En outre, je lui ai assigné la tâche de se demander chaque jour quels vêtements il voulait mettre, de prendre seul une décision à ce sujet et d'imposer son choix à ses parents.

À l'occasion de l'entretien avec les parents, il était très important pour nous de leur faire savoir qu'ils s'étaient fait beaucoup de soucis pour leur fils. Par cette rétroaction, nous avons obtenu un soulagement pour eux-mêmes et pour Theo. La deuxième chose à laquelle nous tenions beaucoup était de leur faire comprendre qu'inscrire Theo au cours de lecture-écriture, c'était un peu comme mettre la charrue avant les bœufs. Leur fils devait d'abord apprendre à décider par lui-même et à assumer des

responsabilités. Le père et la mère ont d'abord réagi en disant : « Il n'est pas capable, il faut prendre les décisions à sa place. » Nous leur avons dit qu'il ne s'agissait pas de lui faire prendre toutes les décisions et de lui remettre toutes les responsabilités, car cela dépasserait ses capacités, mais qu'ils devraient toutefois lui donner une certaine responsabilité personnelle sur le plan de l'habillement, où ils pourraient vérifier comment il se débrouillait.

En outre, nous leur avons expliqué que Theo suivait le cours pour leur faire plaisir, mais que ce cours dépassait pour le moment ses capacités et qu'ils devraient lui donner la chance de sentir une motivation personnelle. Les deux parents ont été très soulagés par l'entretien et ont exprimé leur intention de faire ce qui avait été convenu.

Deux mois plus tard, le père de Theo nous a appelé pour nous dire que son fils ne voulait toujours pas suivre le cours de lecture-écriture, mais qu'à la maison, la situation était beaucoup plus calme, que Theo semblait plus équilibré, que sa femme se portait beaucoup mieux, et que lui et elle avaient bon espoir que Theo ferait bien son chemin dans la vie, car maintenant il démontrait plus de maturité.

LE DÉVELOPPEMENT DE LA PERSONNALITÉ

Vivre la non-maîtrise ou la maîtrise insuffisante de choses qui dans la société sont « évidentes », comme le langage écrit, conduit à une image plus ou moins négative de soi.

En public, on essaie de ne pas laisser paraître cette tare par un comportement bien adapté. Dans la société d'aujourd'hui, en effet, toute personne aux prises avec des difficultés de langage écrit est considérée comme sotte. Peu de gens ayant ce genre de problèmes s'affichent. D'après nos expériences, la majorité d'entre eux ont peur que l'on découvre qu'ils sont analphabètes et de passer pour sots.

Au cours des entretiens d'orientation, nous constatons souvent que les gens ont tendance à mettre leur ignorance du langage écrit sur le compte de leur paresse ou de leur manque d'intelligence. Il est plus rare qu'ils fassent un lien avec les problèmes qu'ils ont avec leur entourage immédiat (parents, instituteurs, etc.). On se dit aussi très volontiers dyslexique. C'est une façon de se laver les mains du problème, car, bien sûr, on ne peut pas être responsable d'une maladie, qui peut d'ailleurs servir à expliquer tous les futurs échecs.

Nous considérons donc la notion de dyslexie comme très dangereuse, qu'il y ait ou non une maladie désignée par ce terme, parce qu'elle met la personne dans un état passif à l'égard de son problème de langage écrit et l'empêche ainsi de voir que sa situation peut être modifiée. Nous

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avons également affaire à des gens dont les travaux écrits qu'ils faisaient à l'école n'étaient pas notés parce qu'ils étaient dyslexiques, c'est-à-dire que souvent ces personnes ne disposent d'aucune possibilité d'évaluation qui permettrait de déterminer la fréquence des fautes qu'elles commettent. En raison de cet état de choses, elles ne gardent qu'une image floue de leur problème.

La crainte d'être «démasqué» est grande, mais il y a aussi la peur d'échouer et de s'exposer ainsi au risque de décevoir de nouveau son entourage. Une autre peur est celle de découvrir à un certain moment que l'on n'est pas assez intelligent pour apprendre.

En raison du jugement porté sur lui par la société, et des craintes qu'il finit par éprouver, l'analphabète est obligé d'afficher un comportement méfiant à l'égard des autres. Cela prend parfois beaucoup de temps avant qu'il ne soit en mesure de se confier à quelqu'un. Nous avons vu des cas à l'AOB où le conjoint de longue date ne savait rien des difficultés d'écriture de son partenaire. Dans la plupart des cas, cependant, au moins le partenaire est au courant du problème et est intéressé en raison du soutien qu'il apporte à son conjoint. La méfiance oblige l'analphabète à exercer un contrôle sur toutes les situations, ce qui entraîne souvent une tendance à chercher les situations connues et à éviter les situations nouvelles. Cet état de choses entraîne à son tour une réduction des possibilités de comportement et, en fin de compte, un rétrécissement de la personnalité.

À cause de leur manque de compétence en matière de langage écrit, dans un monde organisé autour de l'écrit, les analphabètes sont obligés de trouver leurs propres points de repère. Ainsi, pour acheter de la nourriture pour chats, par exemple, une femme s'orientait d'après les couleurs des boîtes; un homme qui devait distribuer des médicaments dans une clinique se fiait aux couleurs et à la configuration des emballages. En 15 ans, il ne lui est jamais arrivé de se tromper.

Les capacités réduites de perception et le transfert vers des moyens autres que l'écriture élargissent les possibilités dans d'autres directions, un peu comme la finesse de l'ouïe s'aiguise chez un aveugle. Une autre des facultés qui s'améliorent lorsqu'on ne peut rien écrire, c'est la capacité de mémorisation. Dans nos cours, il nous arrive souvent de voir quelqu'un qui ne sait pas lire, mémoriser une page d'un texte lu à haute voix par quelqu'un d'autre, et rendre mot pour mot la page en question. C'est une performance qu'on ne voit normalement que chez les eidétiques.

La dépendance à l'égard de personnes qui savent lire et écrire existe toujours, car tout le monde doit remplir un jour ou l'autre au moins un formulaire. Cette dépendance comporte un sentiment d'impuissance, l'impression d'être à la merci d'autrui, mais aussi un sentiment de «pouvoir», d'avoir quelqu'un qui nous aide, et la possibilité de donner à

quelqu'un l'occasion de montrer qu'il est meilleur. À cela s'ajoute la peur d'être exploité ou, au contraire, privilégié. Si l'analphabète ose apprendre, la crainte s'installe souvent chez lui de voir l'«autre» partir quand il saura se débrouiller tout seul.

LES PARTENAIRES DE L'ANALPHABÈTE

La mère est souvent une personne très proche de l'analphabète et son partenaire. Mais le membre le plus proche de l'entourage peut être également un professionnel de l'aide, comme le travailleur social.

Ces personnes ont toujours en commun une meilleure estime de soi que l'analphabète, et si elles ont de légères difficultés de langage écrit, celles-ci se remarquent moins. Il s'agit souvent de personnes qui sont, elles aussi, peu sûres d'elles, et qui manquent de reconnaissance sociale. Elles se sentent valorisées par l'analphabétisme du partenaire et moralement supérieures à celui-ci. Elles ont besoin d'un tel partenaire parce qu'elles ont peu d'estime de soi.

La faible estime de soi de ces individus est souvent associée à la crainte que leurs amis puissent découvrir qu'ils se tiennent avec un «nigaud», et qu'ils en tirent des conclusions sur leur compte. À cela s'ajoute la crainte que le partenaire soit ou reste avec eux uniquement parce qu'il a besoin de leur aide. Ici également, on observe la faible estime de soi.

Et si le partenaire s'inscrit à un cours de lecture-écriture, peut-être même à l'instigation de l'autre, la crainte s'installe de le voir progresser et partir. La personne qui aide ne peut se sentir plus à l'aise que le partenaire qu'aussi longtemps qu'elle peut aider ce dernier. Si son aide n'est plus requise, il peut survenir à la limite un effondrement de la personnalité, comme des états dépressifs, etc.

Chez les mères qui considèrent que leur rôle dans la vie consiste à aider leur fils adulte à remplir des papiers, le gardant ainsi au niveau d'un enfant, surgit la crainte de perdre celui qui, peut-être, ne leur rendait visite que lorsqu'il avait besoin de quelqu'un pour lire et écrire.

La personne qui aide dépend de la possibilité de pouvoir aider. Si son aide n'est plus requise, elle est obligée soit de trouver d'autres domaines où elle peut aider, soit de changer en tant qu'individu. Elle luttera d'abord pour maintenir le statu quo, mais il faudra bien sûr tenir compte du fait qu'elle n'a pas l'intention de nuire à la personne à laquelle elle apporte son aide.

CHANGEMENTS DANS LES RELATIONS ET LA PERSONNALITÉ

Apprendre, c'est changer. Les personnes qui viennent suivre nos cours veulent changer, modifier quelque chose, mais de façon que tout le reste demeure autant que possible inchangé. Seulement une partie de l'ensemble doit être modifiée, et ce autant que possible de manière indolore. Ce n'est que durant le cours que l'étendue du changement dans la personnalité de l'individu et dans ses relations devient apparente.

Si un analphabète qui, par exemple, ne connaît que quelques lettres apprend à les utiliser de façon utile et à élargir ses connaissances jusqu'à savoir écrire son nom sans aide, il s'opère un changement dans sa personnalité et son entourage. Il va alors apprendre à être plus confiant, à essayer quelque chose de sa propre initiative, sans dépendre autant de l'autre. Cela veut dire aussi que cette autre personne doit être prête à changer, à faire des concessions et à courir le risque d'avoir un partenaire qui n'est plus comme avant. C'est un processus difficile, qui requiert de l'assistance. En s'appropriant une partie du langage écrit, l'analphabète apprend plus que de simples lettres. Il apprend qu'il peut apprendre, devenir plus autonome et avoir une plus grande estime de soi. Cependant, il apprend aussi qu'il a lui-même contribué à son ignorance par le passé. Il apprend qu'il peut influer sur sa situation, qu'il peut la modifier.

Lorsque l'apprenant connaît un premier succès, qu'il considère aussi comme tel, il atteint un point critique dans le processus d'apprentissage. Il doit en effet décider s'il se sent capable d'aller plus loin, ou si lui ou son partenaire ont peur de changer et de mettre en péril leur relation.

À ce stade, des entretiens d'orientation deviennent nécessaires pour les deux intéressés, qui doivent alors verbaliser leurs craintes avec l'aide du conseiller, car les deux personnes ne se font pas mutuellement confiance. L'importance accordée à l'extériorisation des craintes et le fait que cette extériorisation semble aller de soi apportent aux deux partenaires un énorme soulagement psychique.

Se laisser entraîner de nouveau dans le processus d'apprentissage, c'est accepter d'abandonner des systèmes de dépendance qui s'accompagnaient certes de difficultés, mais qui ont été utiles durant des années. C'est aussi vouloir faire de nouvelles expériences d'apprentissage au sujet desquelles on ne peut pas encore savoir si elles peuvent nous aider davantage et nous donner plus de reconnaissance que les anciennes. Tous les analphabètes adultes ont déjà eu en effet des expériences négatives en essayant d'acquérir la maîtrise du langage écrit.

RÉCAPITULATION — ÉVALUATION

Il n'y a pas qu'une seule méthode d'alphabétisation. Le fait d'avoir employé une seule méthode d'acquisition de la lecture (correspondant à

la façon de penser qui existait à une époque donnée, soit la méthode d'analyse-synthèse ou, encore, la méthode globale) dans les écoles primaires a sans doute contribué à l'apparition de problèmes de lecture-écriture. Ces difficultés ont pu se manifester parce qu'on a dû négliger de prendre en considération l'attitude de chaque écolier à l'égard de l'apprentissage, sa capacité et son rythme d'apprentissage, ainsi que ses possibilités d'acquisition des connaissances langagières.

Cette erreur a été répétée en Europe au début de l'alphabétisation, et également durant les premières années d'existence de l'AOB. La méthode privilégiée à l'époque était celle de la segmentation en morphèmes[3]. Celle-ci fut remplacée par l'approche fondée sur l'expérience langagière[4]. Entretemps, les alphabétiseurs ont compris, eux aussi, que la méthode à utiliser doit correspondre au niveau d'apprentissage de l'apprenant et pouvoir être appliquée par ce dernier dans la vie de tous les jours.

La transposition de la méthode dans le quotidien implique un changement d'attitude chez l'apprenant. Lorsque, par exemple, un débutant essaie, en rentrant chez lui, de découvrir ce qu'il a appris durant le cours d'alphabétisation, le changement d'attitude a réussi. Changer d'attitude, c'est changer jusqu'à son comportement actif et cesser d'endurer passivement. C'est aussi assumer la responsabilité de son propre apprentissage. Pour aider l'apprenant dans cette démarche, nos conseillères et nos formatrices se mettent à sa disposition.

Les aspects convaincants de notre méthode sont, d'après nous, les possibilités qu'elle offre à l'analphabète de voir ses progrès, grâce à un suivi, et de bénéficier en même temps de l'aide dont il a besoin. Cette méthode requiert cependant une collaboration intensive entre les formatrices et les conseillères. Or, c'est exactement sur ce plan que cette approche comporte des difficultés dans la pratique.

La coopération nécessaire pour, par exemple, définir des objectifs intermédiaires dans la démarche d'apprentissage d'une personne fait problème lorsqu'il y a des rivalités entre les formatrices ou entre celles-ci et les conseillères. Il y a en effet le danger qu'en raison de ces rivalités, des doutes ou des réserves ne soient pas exprimés, que des faits nouveaux passent inaperçus et que des évaluations personnelles soient défendues obstinément en dépit de l'existence de meilleures analyses.

Les compétences requises des formatrices et des conseillères qui veulent travailler selon la méthode que nous venons de décrire sont élevées.

Une collaboration est possible lorsque les formatrices et les conseillères sont prêtes à résoudre leurs propres problèmes d'apprentissage et à apprendre ainsi à élargir leur perception d'elle-même. La réflexion critique au sein de l'équipe de formatrices ou de conseillères[5] sert également

à l'élargissement de l'horizon et est indispensable pour pouvoir effectuer un travail professionnel.

Cette façon de travailler, qui prévoit deux personnes-ressources pour chaque apprenant et qui comporte des exigences constantes sur le plan des compétences des éducateurs et des conseillers, est une formule coûteuse mais efficace. Cependant, il n'est pas nécessaire d'offrir un suivi aussi serré à tous les analphabètes: nombre d'entre eux peuvent s'en passer. Un service de ce genre devrait néanmoins exister pour ceux qui en ont besoin.

Nous ne prétendons pas que cette méthode est la meilleure approche de l'alphabétisation. Nous croyons plutôt qu'une différenciation plus poussée qu'auparavant s'impose dans le travail d'alphabétisation, afin de tenir compte des différences importantes qui existent entre les personnes qui sont aux prises avec des difficultés de lecture et d'écriture.

NOTES

1. Toute action est communication. On ne peut pas ne pas agir. À l'intérieur d'un système, le comportement de l'individu a des effets sur tous les autres membres du système. Lorsqu'une variable du système est modifiée, le système doit être redéfini.

2. À moins que la personne qui conseille ne se rende compte que sa propre expérience d'apprentissage l'empêche de conseiller adéquatement le client. Si tel est le cas, elle l'adressera à une autre conseillère.

3. Décomposition d'un mot en plus petites unités sémantiques.

4. À partir des expériences langagières quotidiennes des apprenants, on effectue l'analyse de mots, phrases, etc.

5. On analyse alors des cas réels, on émet des hypothèses, on discute des façons de procéder et on désigne des objectifs concrets.

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LA FORMATION, UN OUTIL DE LUTTE CONTRE TOUT ENFERMEMENT?

Didier Andreau
Christophe Caron
Francis Gosset
Action-Formation-Étude-Recherche,
Lille, France

INTRODUCTION

Aujourd'hui en France, on lutte contre l'illettrisme en faisant du «pédagogisme» avant tout.

Quelques-uns, et nous en sommes, affirment que c'est sur les pratiques, sur les raisons de lire qu'il faut se pencher, car personne ne peut acquérir des techniques d'une pratique qu'il n'a pas. On peut apprendre à lire aux gens qu'on engage dans des programmes où l'apprentissage de la lecture est nécessaire. «Si je vis dans une société qui n'a pas besoin que je lise, je ne lis pas.»

Il peut paraître contradictoire qu'une telle affirmation soit faite par un centre de formation dont la «mission» est justement pédagogique. La question se pose donc de savoir quelle est la place d'un écrit provenant d'un centre de formation dans un ouvrage traitant de la lutte contre l'illettrisme à travers des pratiques extra-pédagogiques.

En France nous avons l'habitude de manier le paradoxe. Si, pour nous, l'illettrisme est avant tout un problème politique et qu'il dépasse largement le cadre de la recherche pédagogique et des simples réponses pratiques, il nous fallait être inscrit dans un champ pédagogique, celui de la formation, pour être en mesure de tenter d'y apporter des réponses.

Mis à part les grands objectifs annoncés avec tambours et trompettes et quelques tentatives de pluripartenariats, il n'existe pratiquement pas, chez nous, de réels moyens permettant de créer des pratiques innovantes de lutte contre l'illettrisme entre les divers organismes qui s'occupent de cette question. Nous sommes contraints de nous inscrire dans le canevas des organes de tutelle qui nous financent, ce qui suppose l'obéissance aux cahiers des charges qui ne laissent pas toute la latitude possible.

Notre association, qui s'est inscrite dans le champ de la formation porteuse d'un choix politique et idéologique en proposant des actions de formation allant dans le sens d'une solution de rechange à l'enfermement, tente depuis sa création de gérer au mieux cette contradiction. C'est ce que nous tenterons de montrer.

Nous essaierons dans un premier temps, par un retour historique sur notre association, de décrire notre démarche; comment, à partir de l'option idéologique qui a guidé le choix de nos actions, celles-ci ont nourri des réflexions qui, à leur tour, ont entraîné d'autres actions, parmi lesquelles la lutte contre l'illettrisme tient une place prépondérante.

La deuxième partie tentera, à travers l'atelier pédagogique personnalisé et le secteur insertion, de montrer comment, dans les séquences de formation, nous cherchons à éviter le pédagogisme en permettant aux individus de s'approprier leur formation et de mettre sur pied des projets dans lesquels la lecture peut prendre sens pour eux.

L'HISTOIRE DE L'ACTION-FORMATION-ÉTUDE-RECHERCHE (AFER)

En 1978 a lieu une restructuration dans une école de formation de travailleurs sociaux de la banlieue lilloise touchant aussi l'emploi de ses formateurs. Après de longues et dures luttes, certains ne se résignent pas. La vague montante (nous sommes à la fin de la décennie 1970) est porteuse d'un espoir d'autogestion. Les débats sont ardus, «l'alternative c'est pour demain». En tout cas, l'alternance politique en France commence à poindre.

Les formateurs licenciés économiques de l'École de service social créent l'association Action-Formation-Étude-Recherche (AFER). Ce sera un collectif proposant des actions de formation «différentes dans leurs contenus et dans leurs formes, mettant en œuvre de nouvelles formes de collaboration, de nouveaux rapports au sein du collectif de travail».

• La période de gestation (1978-1982)

La création de l'AFER est le fruit de plusieurs années de réflexion, de pratiques et d'actions auprès des travailleurs sociaux de la région Nord — Pas-de-Calais.

«L'association AFER a pour objet de promouvoir, favoriser, développer tous les moyens propres à la formation sanitaire, sociale, culturelle. Cette action se poursuivra à tous les stades: conception, étude, contacts, formation, recherche» (extraits des statuts). Elle propose aux personnels du secteur sanitaire et social une approche différente de la réalité quotidienne et professionnelle.

«L'ensemble des actions de formation menées s'inscrit dans une démarche alternative. L'objet est de construire des outils méthodologiques et pédagogiques pour la formation d'adultes. Notre fonctionnement autogéré permet une appropriation du quotidien par l'ensemble des individus composant le collectif. Chacun est maître d'œuvre de ses actions, de

l'émergence de l'idée à son évaluation en passant par sa conception, sa négociation et sa réalisation» (extrait du texte du projet de création de l'Atelier pédagogique personnalisé, 1986).

L'objectif fixé pour la première année est double: d'une part poursuivre l'action de formation continue auprès des salariés du secteur sanitaire et social, d'autre part se faire connaître.

L'action de formation est, dans un premier temps, centrée sur les personnels de la psychiatrie. Elle est complétée par la mise en place d'une structure de démarchage qui prend la forme d'actions médiatiques à l'échelle régionale, nationale, internationale: des soirées-débats, des journées d'études sur des thèmes dans la mouvance de l'antipsychiatrie.

Parallèlement aux actions de formation continue et à la construction de l'image de marque, la réflexion sur la mise en place d'autres actions et d'autres terrains d'action suit son cours. L'AFER souhaite proposer quelque chose de plus large, une mutualisation de moyens. C'est la naissance d'AFER-diffusion, une expérience qui durera trois ans et qui proposera, pour des groupes de musique et de théâtre, la mise à disposition de son secrétariat à mi-temps pour gérer les tâches administratives liées à l'activité culturelle.

Quatre axes principaux règlent donc la vie de notre association naissante:

— L'action dans la formation continue des personnels du secteur sanitaire et social;

— La pérennisation de l'association par la mise en place d'un mécanisme permanent de débats et de confrontations sur les pratiques de lutte contre l'enfermement;

— La promotion d'entreprises culturelles par la mutualisation de moyens techniques;

— L'expérimentation d'une nouvelle forme de relations dans l'entreprise.

• L'émergence du problème de l'illettrisme

L'objectif que l'on s'était fixé d'acquérir une notoriété grâce à la création d'un lieu de débat permanent sur l'exclusion commence à être atteint. L'action auprès des salariés du secteur sanitaire et social a fait naître de nouvelles interrogations, entre autres sur l'hypothèse d'une action conjointe auprès des personnels et auprès du public du secteur. À la suite

d'expériences de formation technique auprès des travailleurs handicapés des Centres d'aide par le travail (CAT: structures de production pour les personnes handicapées adultes considérées comme inaptes à travailler en milieu ordinaire), l'AFER est sollicitée pour mettre en place une action de formation visant l'insertion en milieu de travail ordinaire de jeunes travailleurs handicapés.

Le succès enregistré par cette action va permettre la première grande mutation de l'association. Les mesures mises en place par le nouveau gouvernement socialiste, précisément le plan d'insertion sociale et professionnelle pour les jeunes de 16 à 25 ans (appelé plan Swartz), vont donner naissance à la filière «insertion» de l'AFER.

Les mesures accompagnant la mise en place du plan d'insertion des jeunes offrent désormais un cadre juridique et financier aux actions de formation qui s'adressent aux jeunes demandeurs d'emploi.

Au bout d'un an et demi de fonctionnement, les résultats attendus dans ces stages ne sont pas à la hauteur des espérances de l'association. Quelques conclusions sont ébauchées:

— L'objectif d'insertion en milieu ordinaire ne colle pas à cette population (tout au moins à court terme), trop marquée socialement, trop enfermée et dans un état psychologique dégradé. De plus, la durée de ces actions et les moyens dégagés pour leur mise en place sont trop réduits pour permettre de réaliser l'objectif d'insertion professionnelle assigné aux organismes;

— Les outils d'action ne sont pas adaptés à ce public, notamment en ce qui concerne l'approche de l'illettrisme. Ce problème apparaît de plus en plus clairement comme étant l'obstacle principal à l'accession à la formation et par conséquent à l'emploi.

À l'époque, les organismes qui travaillent sur le terrain de l'illettrisme font le même constat: l'énorme difficulté, si non l'incapacité d'aborder l'illettrisme avec les méthodes d'apprentissage traditionnelles, en l'absence de formation de formateurs et en l'absence de politique et de recherche. L'illettrisme étant jusqu'alors considéré comme inexistant en France, on comprend l'absence de recherche et a fortiori d'outils pédagogiques spéciaux.

Au regard de ces conclusions, l'AFER prend deux types de mesures:

— Revoir la stratégie d'action. Le public est trop jeune, trop en difficulté, pour envisager une insertion professionnelle, même à moyen terme. Le cadre juridique, les moyens et les durées sont inadaptés à une action en profondeur. L'AFER réoriente son

action vers un public plus âgé, dans le cadre d'actions expérimentales d'une durée de deux ans;

— Mandater deux permanents pour se renseigner au pays et à l'étranger sur les pédagogies et les pratiques de lutte contre l'illettrisme. Les investigations débouchent sur la rencontre avec l'AFL (Association française pour la lecture). C'est le coup de foudre! L'ensemble des membres de l'association participent à une formation de formateurs à l'école de l'AFL et s'engagent dans une politique de lecture bien précise.

• De la rencontre avec l'AFL à la journée régionale sur l'illettrisme

La rencontre de l'AFL: un parti pris

Nous avions rencontré une association dont la pratique et les idées faisaient écho à ce que nous percevions sur le terrain. Selon Jean Foucambert, de l'AFL, l'évolution de la situation de la lecture en France dépend de la mise en œuvre d'une politique globale.

Une action limitée à un seul domaine ne profite qu'à ceux qui n'ont pas besoin d'aide dans les autres domaines. Améliorer le niveau technique de lecture sans rien faire d'autre, c'est apporter de l'aide à ceux qui sont déjà lecteurs. Cela implique des mesures nouvelles:

— «Une campagne permanente d'information sur la nature et les enjeux de la lecture permettant la remise en cause du statut social de la lecture et de la non-lecture.

— «Lire, c'est accepter de partager le pouvoir. C'est prendre des responsabilités, c'est accepter que le plus grand nombre en prenne.

— «Aider à l'augmentation du nombre de lecteurs, c'est remettre en cause sa propre pratique de lecteur.

— «Promouvoir l'utilisation des équipements collectifs qui permettent de choisir ce que l'on va lire.

— «Concevoir des actions en faveur de la lecture comme une aide à l'exercice d'une pratique qui va du rejet assumé au choix, en passant par la contestation et le détournement.

— «Développer des écrits nouveaux, avec un référentiel et des valeurs différents.

— La lecture met en œuvre des processus d'une nature et d'une complexité sans commune mesure avec ceux que requiert l'utilisation rudimentaire par la voie alphabétique dont disposent encore aujourd'hui près de 70 % des individus. C'est dire qu'un important investissement méthodologique doit être opéré, tant dans l'apprentissage initial que dans les phases suivantes de perfectionnement[1].»

Apprendre à lire, aider le plus grand nombre à acquérir du pouvoir (et le partager), tel est notre projet et le sens de nos actions depuis la création de l'association. Restait à nous former à la pédagogie de l'AFL pour une appropriation plus efficace des outils de formation et à reprendre notre bâton de pèlerin pour de nouvelles aventures et de nouveaux débats.

La journée régionale sur l'illettrisme (17 octobre 1984)

Suivant la façon de procéder à l'AFER, l'investissement dans la pédagogie de l'AFL ne pouvait rester confidentiel. Les premières conclusions de nos pratiques avec le public adulte devaient être discutées sur la place publique. L'actualité d'une mobilisation autour de l'illettrisme, en parallèle avec la montée du chômage, ne concernait pas uniquement les pédagogues.

Après une série d'actions sur le problème de l'illettrisme, des commissions de travail ont défini une série de questions et de pistes de travail:

— Est-ce utile de savoir lire et écrire aujourd'hui étant donné les progrès techniques, notamment le développement de la robotique?

— La lutte contre l'illettrisme n'est-elle pas une forme de normalisation?

— Faut-il un dispositif spécial?

— Le plaisir est-il nécessaire pour être lecteur?

— Actuellement, le non-lecteur est de plus en plus inondé d'écrits. Sans les outils de décodage, il se trouve de plus en plus marginalisé. Quels sont les moyens les plus efficaces pour mettre au point ces outils?

— Mettre sur pied des actions d'information en vue de démythifier les idées reçues sur la question;

— Faire le bilan des formations existantes et de leurs limites;

— Constituer et diffuser un fichier des organismes qui luttent contre l'illettrisme dans la région;

— Mettre sur pied des actions de prévention de l'illettrisme pour la petite enfance, d'intervention et de soutien scolaire et périscolaire pour les moins de 16 ans;

— Créer une formation de formateurs adaptée;

Le nombre de participants (250) à cette journée régionale a montré l'importance du problème, ainsi que le degré d'impuissance de nombreux formateurs.

• La troisième époque: des actions expérimentales à la mise en place de l'APP

À la suite de la journée d'orientation, l'organisme réinvestit les acquis de l'AFL et ceux du colloque dans la formation continue. Des stages de sensibilisation sont proposés à des équipes de professionnels désireux de mettre en place dans leurs établissements des dynamiques autour de la lecture. Des formations conjointes proposent aux usagers et aux professionnels une remise en cause de leur statut de lecteur, une réflexion sur l'acte de lire et un rapport méthodologique et pédagogique.

Parallèlement, l'AFER a mis en place de 1983 à 1985 des actions expérimentales pour demandeurs d'emploi de longue durée (DELD) de plus de 21 ans et pour demandeurs d'emploi de longue durée handicapés (DELDH), reconnus aptes à travailler ou travaillant en milieu ordinaire. À l'époque, il n'existait aucun mécanisme de prise en charge de ces publics. Ces actions de formation visent l'insertion sociale et professionnelle d'un public en difficulté (illettrés, personnes ayant des troubles du comportement ou des difficultés relationnelles, handicapés moteurs ou mentaux sortant de prison ou d'un suivi psychiatrique, etc.).

Notre connaissance de ce public dans le cadre des diverses institutions et le questionnement de celles-ci face à l'enfermement ou à l'exclusion nous invitent à mener des actions d'insertion en milieu ordinaire, hors d'un cadre institutionnalisé.

Les expériences avec le public jeune nous conduisent à mettre en place des actions de longue durée. En effet, on ne peut pas, en quelques semaines, amener ces personnes vers une autonomie, les amener à trouver ou à retrouver des repères dans l'espace et dans le temps, à s'ouvrir sur le monde social, professionnel, culturel, à dépasser des stratégies de contournement de l'écrit après des années passées dans un univers de fuite

et de repli sur soi. Il faut, à travers des situations concrètes, amener ces personnes à sortir d'un enfermement lié au chômage de longue durée ou à un problème de santé mentale.

L'expérience de ces deux stages nous amène à l'idée de l'individualisation des formations permettant l'acquisition de la capacité d'autoévaluation et d'autoformation, grâce à des situations de composition avec la réalité dont le stagiaire peut tirer lui-même un bilan positif.

Le résultat du travail avec ces personnes est concluant: acquisition d'une plus grande autonomie, d'une plus grande ouverture, d'une plus grande confiance en soi permettant de sortir de situations constamment reproduites et reconduisant inévitablement à l'échec; insertion professionnelle, parfois formation qualifiante, inimaginables auparavant.

C'est par rapport à des projets précis à réaliser que peut se faire la prise de conscience de la relation que chacun entretient avec l'écrit (qu'elle soit d'utilisation ou de contournement) et c'est bien à partir de cette prise de conscience, favorisée par le contexte de formation, que peut se mettre en place un apprentissage de la lecture. Toute demande qui ne respecterait pas ces étapes replacerait l'individu en situation d'«élève», établissant entre le formateur et le formé la relation ambiguë qui existe entre celui qui a les solutions et celui qui en a besoin.

• L'AFER aujourd'hui: que reste-t-il de nos amours?

Aujourd'hui, l'AFER comprend 24 salariés se répartissant dans les 8 filières suivantes:

— Atelier pédagogique personnalisé (5 salariés et 1 objecteur de conscience).
Public: tous publics de plus de 16 ans, quels que soient le niveau, le projet, les difficultés et le statut.
Partenaires: État, région, département, communes, Fonds d'action sociale (FAS), Agence pour l'emploi, travailleurs sociaux, entreprises, organismes d'accueil et d'orientation, etc.

— Filière Demandeurs d'emploi longue durée Lille (5 salariés).

— Filière Demandeurs d'emploi longue durée Tourcoing (4 salariés).
Publics: demandeurs d'emploi jeunes et adultes, travailleurs handicapés, sortant de prison ou d'établissement psychiatrique.
Partenaires: État, région, département, communes, Agence pour l'emploi, travailleurs sociaux, Direction du travail, entreprises, organismes d'accueil et d'orientation, etc.

— Filière Formation continue (3 salariés).
Public : personnels du secteur sanitaire et social, salariés d'entreprises, etc.
Partenaires : essentiellement les entreprises.

— Filière Multimédias (2 salariés).
Public : pas de public, du moins directement. C'est une filière de production d'outils pédagogiques multimédias.
Partenaires : État, région, entreprises spécialisées dans les nouvelles technologies et l'audiovisuel, travailleurs sociaux, lieux d'accueil et d'orientation.

— Filière Secrétariat (4 salariés).

— Filière « La petite maison ». Elle fonctionne avec la participation de permanents des autres filières.
Public : toute personne accompagnée d'un enfant de moins de quatre ans désireuse de discuter de la petite enfance.
Partenaires : comme les autres filières, plus tous les services liés à la petite enfance et les partenaires du quartier d'implantation.

— Deux salariés sont actuellement détachés auprès de la mission régionale Nouvelles qualifications pour une action à Villeneuve d'Ascq.

La notion de filière est liée à la nature de l'action, au public touché, et également à l'établissement ou à l'organisme dont dépend ce public. Certains salariés travaillent simultanément dans plusieurs filières. Chaque salarié (en principe) peut changer de filière.

En plus de ces secteurs d'action, nous nous sommes dotés de groupes « transversaux » ou « interfilières ». Ces groupes de recherche sont le lieu de confrontation des pratiques de chacun sur un problème d'action (la lecture, par exemple), sur un public particulier, ou encore sur des outils (la filière Multimédias comme la filière « Petite maison » ont été créées à la suite d'interrogations nées dans des réflexions transversales). Un permanent est désigné pour être la personne-ressource de ce groupe.

Des origines nous avons gardé le principe autogestionnaire. Tous les salariés permanents ont le même salaire. Il n'y a pas de directeur. Chacun peut être appelé à mener un projet aussi bien dans sa conception, sa négociation, sa réalisation, son évaluation. Chacun, à tour de rôle, est censé représenter l'association. Chacun est membre de l'AFER et à ce titre participe à l'assemblée générale mensuelle avec une voix délibérative.

La gestion quotidienne et centrale de l'association est laissée aux soins d'un pool regroupant des représentants mandatés par les filières, chaque filière se dotant de l'outil de gestion le plus approprié à son activité.

En ce qui concerne l'organisation du temps de travail, il y a un temps de négociation institutionnelle, un temps de recherche-préparation, un temps de coordination et un temps d'action. La répartition est modulée en fonction de la filière et de la période en question.

Notre secteur d'action est surtout régional : concentré sur Lille, Tourcoing et Villeneuve d'Ascq pour le public en difficulté, réparti sur tout le territoire pour la formation continue.

Les partenaires sont multiples. Il n'y a pas de lieu central dans l'association où sont intégrés les partenaires. C'est chaque filière, et parfois chaque individu, qui gère son réseau de partenaires. Telle filière conviera ses partenaires à un groupe de pilotage en fonction de telle ou telle problématique (par exemple, en APP; voir la section suivante); telle autre rencontrera ses partenaires dans une réunion de bilan après une action ou encore dans un groupe de travail.

La situation est la même en ce qui concerne le public accueilli. Chaque filière apporte des réponses au cas par cas. Dans telle action, les stagiaires vont définir eux-mêmes leurs horaires. Dans telle autre, ce sera un budget de fonctionnement qui leur sera alloué et ils en auront la gestion.

Dans l'ensemble, nous incitons les personnes à définir leurs objectifs de formation et nous leur proposons une démarche d'autoformation (d'autogestion de leur formation; voir la section suivante). En effet, un de nos objectifs est l'appropriation par les stagiaires de leur parcours.

La question de leur intégration dans la gestion centrale de l'association est une question permanente. Cela dit, nous n'avons pas encore trouvé de formule pour que cette intégration soit possible. Cela pose exactement les mêmes questions que pour les partenaires — financiers et autres — avec, d'une part, la difficulté de la limitation des durées de formation, et, d'autre part, la difficulté qu'a cette population à s'inscrire dans ce type de démarche. Comme ces gens n'ont jamais été invités à partager le pouvoir, la démarche, lorsque nous essayons de l'introduire, leur paraît bizarre, voire indécente.

Un autre problème est l'absence, localement et nationalement, de regroupement de personnes en difficultés susceptible de représenter ces personnes aux seins des organismes qui s'occupent d'elles. L'état de délabrement dans lequel se trouve le mouvement syndical et le traditionnel manque d'intérêt que porte ce dernier aux personnes privées d'emploi ne nous permettent pas de penser que les syndicats (dans leur structure actuelle et dans leurs orientations) soient les meilleurs interlocuteurs.

Voilà, rapidement présentée, la situation dans laquelle se trouve le collectif AFER. L'activité de l'association s'est considérablement accrue

en 12 ans. Cette extension ne va pas sans poser un certain nombre de problèmes et de questions, notamment sur les choix et les formes d'action auprès du public. Nous y reviendrons dans la conclusion.

Maintenant que le décor est «planté», nous allons décrire deux types d'action auprès du public en difficulté où la lecture tient une place prépondérante.

L'ATELIER PÉDAGOGIQUE PERSONNALISÉ (APP)

En 1985, le réseau national des Ateliers pédagogiques personnalisés se met en place et, en octobre 1986, naît l'Atelier pédagogique personnalisé à l'AFER.

En principe, l'APP est un espace éducatif individualisé ouvert qui permet à toute personne d'avoir une activité de formation, maillon de son parcours et de son insertion professionnelle, grâce notamment à l'utilisation privilégiée de moyens d'autoformation.

L'objectif premier de l'APP est d'assurer une formation générale qui peut être complétée par une initiation à la technologie de base (connaissance et utilisation d'un outil technique dans des situations diverses). Il ne s'agit en aucun cas d'un apprentissage à caractère professionnel. L'APP n'assure pas les fonctions d'orientation et de bilan.

L'APP s'adresse prioritairement aux individus ayant un projet personnel ou professionnel suffisamment défini et effectuant une démarche volontaire de formation. L'action s'adresse à des publics de tous niveaux et de toutes origines (salariés, demandeurs d'emploi jeunes ou adultes, etc.). Aucun niveau minimum n'est requis pour bénéficier de cette action.

Le cahier des charges stipule également que tous les publics (sauf les salariés) doivent être orientés par les structures d'accueil (permanence d'accueil, d'information et d'orientation, mission locale, centre d'information et d'orientation, Agence nationale pour l'emploi, etc.). Dans le cas où une personne arrive directement à l'APP, elle doit être mise en relation avec une structure d'accueil pour qu'on puisse effectuer un suivi. À cet égard, une fiche de liaison est établie par la structure d'accueil afin d'informer l'APP du nombre de stagiaires envoyés.

L'APP a pour objectif de compléter les autres programmes de formation continue (programme régional, examen spécial d'entrée à l'université, promotion sociale, etc.).

La pratique pédagogique se caractérise par les étapes suivantes:

— Une phase de définition de la formation préalable à la signature du contrat pédagogique;

— Des périodes d'évaluation formative sous forme d'entretiens (moments où le formateur fournit immédiatement à l'apprenant une information sur ses progrès, ses lacunes, et les moyens dont il dispose pour y remédier);

— L'autoformation à partir d'outils mis à la disposition du stagiaire;

— Un soutien personnalisé assuré par des formateurs et des personnes-ressources;

— Une phase de bilan à la fin du contrat pédagogique;

— Une restitution à la structure d'accueil.

Dans son champ de compétence, l'APP classe le stagiaire et définit un contrat d'objectifs individuels qui n'excède pas 150 heures en moyenne. Le contrat peut être renouvelé de manière exceptionnelle et ne peut, en tout état de cause, se substituer à ce que pourrait dispenser un organisme de formation professionnelle. Il est signé par le formé et le formateur, et précise:

— les objectifs visés;

— les contenus de formation;

— la durée globale de la formation et la présence hebdomadaire minimum du candidat à l'APP;

— les modalités de travail;

— les modes de reconnaissance des acquis envisagés.

La structure d'accueil est informée de l'existence de ce contrat par le retour de la fiche de liaison.

À l'issue de la formation, chaque personne recevra une attestation, élément d'un portefeuille de compétences, sur laquelle seront consignés:

— l'intitulé et les contenus de formation suivie pendant la durée du contrat;

— les acquis en fin de contrat;

— les compétences acquises en formation générale.

1. Nos pratiques

L'APP n'est pas un stage au sens classique du terme, c'est-à-dire une action de formation débutant à telle date et finissant à telle date avec x personnes suivant le même parcours, sélectionnées en fonction d'objectifs préétablis, sur des présupposés de niveau scolaire. C'est une structure de formation en perpétuel mouvement s'adressant à toute personne (demandeur d'emploi, salarié, travailleur handicapé, public du secteur sanitaire et social), quel que soit le projet de formation. Le projet peut être, dans le dernier cas, sa propre élaboration. L'idée que l'APP n'est pas un stage s'explique par le fait que chaque stagiaire arrive avec un niveau différent et des attentes diverses, d'où l'impossibilité pour le centre de formation de concevoir un programme, de fixer une durée commune, vu l'hétérogénéité des publics, des statuts, des niveaux, des besoins. En ce sens l'APP est un enchevêtrement d'ateliers ayant comme épine dorsale le projet de l'individu en formation. La formation n'est pas rémunérée, elle est toutefois gratuite et se déroule à temps partiel suivant un rythme hebdomadaire. Les temps de formation sont de 300 heures pour les plus de 25 ans et de 150 heures pour les moins de 25 ans. Le rythme moyen est de 15 heures par semaine. La formation peut s'arrêter n'importe quand si la personne est entrée en formation qualifiante, si elle est retournée au travail ou si tout simplement les services que nous lui proposons ne lui conviennent pas. La formation ne débouche pas sur une qualification (nous ne sommes pas habilités à en délivrer et ce n'est pas non plus un objectif de l'association de le devenir). La formation démarre après une réunion d'information hebdomadaire où l'objet de la formation est exposé aux auditeurs. Au terme de cette réunion d'information, les personnes disent si elles souhaitent ou non intégrer l'APP. Pour ceux qui le désirent, un rendez-vous est pris pour un entretien individuel. Cet entretien, d'une heure environ, permet de faire connaissance avec la personne et d'ébaucher ce que pourra être son projet en APP, les dates, les rythmes et contenus.

Une première planification est élaborée en fonction de ce qu'a pu dire la personne, et cette planification est modifiable à certains moments de la formation (nous y reviendrons). Une période d'auto-évaluation de six semaines et un entretien individuel sont également programmés.

La formation est dès à présent commencée. Nous poursuivrons cette présentation plus loin.

L'autoformation

La situation à la sortie n'est pas l'unique paramètre permettant d'évaluer le parcours de formation du stagiaire à l'APP; la démarche d'autoformation permet d'en établir un autre.

Nos objectifs de formation dans l'APP se résument à une insertion professionnelle directe ou indirecte. Cependant, il nous semble indispensable de prendre en considération d'autres aspects fondamentaux (insertion sociale, autonomie).

Notre démarche de formation vise à considérer de front ces deux aspects indissociables. De ce fait, toute formation a des effets indirects sur la vie et le comportement du stagiaire: redynamisation, nouveau rythme de vie, statut social différent. Mais le public que nous accueillons nous impose une accentuation de ce rôle implicite de la formation pour lui donner un caractère formatif explicite.

Expliciter ce caractère, c'est amener le stagiaire à avoir un rôle, à devenir acteur de son devenir et, pour commencer, de sa propre formation. C'est provoquer une rupture avec le comportement attentiste ou avec une situation d'assistanat.

Pour arriver à ce résultat, il nous faut créer des situations d'apprentissage. La première situation d'apprentissage qui est de fait la plus porteuse de changements est la situation de formation. Exploiter cette situation de formation, c'est donner un champ de liberté: un rôle actif au stagiaire. Il n'est plus le «formé», il a un pouvoir potentiel sur lui-même, sur son devenir, qui lui est accordé dans cette trêve grâce à l'aspect volontaire et gratuit de la situation de formation. La participation à l'APP ne dépend pas d'un besoin de rémunération, mais d'un désir de formation et de reclassement.

Nous proposons au stagiaire un champ d'action certes encadré mais qui est vide, sans contenu, et dont la clé est en sa possession. Et c'est là notre premier objectif à l'APP: donner des outils à l'individu pour qu'il soit l'acteur de sa formation.

L'autoformation a quand même ses limites:

— «La négation de tout apport des autres (je me suis formé tout seul);

— L'utilisation idéologique de l'autoformation: faire naviguer des sujets tout seul dans des systèmes contraignants de rapports sociaux en les persuadant d'avoir un pouvoir qu'ils n'ont pas en fait[2].»

Mais c'est en gardant ces limites en tête que nous pourrons travailler dans le sens voulu. À l'époque où les fissures du système scolaire font apparaître sa fonction première, celle de la reproduction sociale, des colmatages s'imposent. L'autoformation semble être un bon moyen.

La pratique de l'autoformation telle qu'elle a été analysée par Gaston Pineau ne peut se détacher d'un projet d'acquisition d'un pouvoir sur sa vie, sur sa formation.

L'auto-évaluation

Au même titre que le stagiaire tend à devenir l'acteur de sa formation, il cherche à resituer lui-même son parcours de formation en en voyant les enjeux.

Un premier temps d'évaluation formative de six semaines permet aux stagiaires de se situer par rapport à la formation et de définir grâce à des échanges leurs attentes en matière de formation. Nous avons volontairement structuré cette première phase, sachant que chacun des stagiaires négocie son contenu de formation tous les 15 jours.

C'est à partir de demandes des stagiaires que nous avons planifié les activités en trois objectifs:

— Mener un travail d'évaluation et d'auto-évaluation;

— Élaborer des projets de formation personnalisée et les contenus de formation nécessaires;

— Amener les stagiaires à plus d'autonomie dans la prise en charge de leur formation tant dans les contenus que dans la méthode.

Les stagiaires s'inscrivent en fonction d'une planification d'activités qui leur permet de s'évaluer et d'évaluer leur projet de formation sur le plan de l'orientation professionnelle. Ils doivent prévoir aussi du temps pour un travail individualisé et s'inscrire dans la structure de formation que nous offrons.

Un bilan-évaluation s'effectue de façon systématique après chaque atelier. L'outil est le livret d'auto-évaluation dans lequel le stagiaire reporte ce qu'il a acquis pendant la séance, et ce qui est en cours d'acquisition. Un atelier de bilan-évaluation a lieu tous les 15 jours et fonctionne en sous-groupes de stagiaires encadrés par un formateur «tuteur». L'évaluation se fait par rapport aux objectifs à atteindre, ce qui permet d'affiner les contenus. Un entretien d'évaluation individualisé mensuel permet de vérifier l'ensemble du projet d'insertion sociale et professionnelle.

Le livret d'auto-évaluation est la mémoire du stagiaire, qui, d'une part, y garde des traces de son parcours, et, d'autre part, y vérifie la cohérence de sa demande par rapport à son projet initial et élabore au fur et à mesure ce projet.

Le livret du stagiaire, même remanié plusieurs fois, ne nous satisfait pas. Son utilisation est très compliquée et certains stagiaires ont beaucoup de difficultés à intégrer la démarche. Ils ne comprennent pas notre insistance et ce qu'ils considèrent comme des redites (par exemple, le rappel à plusieurs reprises du projet, le bilan tous les 15 jours). Certains ont une vision très scolaire de la formation et privilégient les résultats à la démarche, indépendamment des objectifs.

Les bénéfices sont cependant importants:

— Moins de distorsions entre les objectifs des stagiaires et les contenus de formation;

— Le suivi est facilité, surtout pour les formateurs qui ne sont pas «tuteurs» des stagiaires en question;

— Le stagiaire prend plaisir à accumuler les traces écrites de ses progrès et le livret est un outil privilégié de valorisation.

L'utilisation du livret nous semble malgré tout indispensable. Actuellement, nous réfléchissons à sa modification et surtout au moyen d'associer les stagiaires à cette réflexion.

Le public hétérogène et l'individualisation

Il nous paraît souhaitable d'accueillir un public hétérogène. Partant de la conclusion qu'il est peu souhaitable de s'adresser à un public en difficulté en le cantonnant dans des formations ciblées «public de bas niveau», nous avions fait le choix d'ouvrir davantage l'APP à un public hétérogène, tant sur le plan des projets que sur le plan scolaire, ceci afin de proposer à l'ensemble des stagiaires une structure non pas centrée sur l'intégration massive de savoirs, mais plutôt sur une réflexion liée à l'utilisation de ces savoirs. C'est également pour pouvoir répondre aux demandes grandissantes de formation qui émanaient d'un public que nous n'avions pas l'habitude d'accueillir traditionnellement.

L'hétérogénéité du public est nécessaire pour impulser la dynamique de groupe, mais elle n'empêche pas l'individualisation de la formation.

L'aménagement du cahier des charges

Nous sommes également devant un paradoxe: nous travaillons dans une démarche d'autoformation, mais le cadre imposé et les notions de contrôle qui sont introduites ne favorisent pas toujours cette démarche. L'APP est en relation permanente avec le partenariat local. À cause de la nature

du fonctionnement de l'APP, ces relations sont difficiles à gérer. Elles sont structurées dans:

— des rencontres individualisées;

— des groupes de suivi des stagiaires (partenaires relais);

— un groupe de pilotage;

— des groupes thématiques (illettrisme, revenu minimum d'insertion, actions-recherches).

Le partenariat auquel nous collaborons est représentatif de l'identité de l'APP. Cette identité est un choix de l'organisme qui a développé ses compétences et stratégies en favorisant l'accueil d'un public marginalisé en difficulté d'insertion sociale et professionnelle. Nous tenons cependant à accueillir un public hétérogène, car en aucun cas l'APP ne doit être considéré comme un ghetto, reproduisant l'image de l'échec par le public accueilli.

Il est nécessaire de répondre à toute demande de formation réalisable à l'APP, quelle qu'elle soit. L'APP veut que son image soit représentative des demandes et des besoins locaux du secteur de la formation du public en situation d'exclusion.

2. L'action à travers quelques ateliers

Il existe trois types d'ateliers (les ateliers «à thèmes», les ateliers «fonctionnels» et les ateliers individuels), qui correspondent à des situations de formation différentes, même si parfois la frontière entre eux reste volontairement floue afin de permettre une adaptation à des situations individuelles et de donner aux gens la possibilité de trouver leur propre place.

Les ateliers dits «à thèmes»

Ces ateliers permettent de réunir des personnes éprouvant à un moment donné des besoins similaires dans un même domaine (lecture, calcul). Ils offrent aux publics ayant un faible degré d'autonomie (exemple: les premiers arrivants) la possibilité d'aborder les apprentissages de base en groupe. Ils sont aussi le lieu privilégié pour amorcer une réflexion ou enclencher des processus d'autoformation (Qu'est-ce qu'être lecteur? Qu'est-ce qu'apprendre? Comment apprend-on?).

C'est là aussi que les apprentissages peuvent s'appuyer sur une dynamique de groupe, sur des projets collectifs comme la réalisation d'un journal. Le travail avec un public en difficulté nécessite de passer par des phases

de socialisation, ce qui n'est pas facile à réaliser dans d'autres situations de formation, en travail individuel par exemple.

Sans ces moments privilégiés, nous ne réussirions pas à motiver les personnes dont le problème est dans un premier temps plus un besoin d'apprendre à se structurer qu'un besoin de formation.

Ces différents objectifs sont poursuivis simultanément ou non. La régulation se fait par la configuration des groupes à un moment donné. De même, certains thèmes émergent, d'autres disparaissent en fonction de l'intérêt des personnes à un moment donné: ainsi, la réunion d'un groupe de femmes avait fait émerger le désir de mettre en place un atelier sur le thème de la petite enfance, atelier qui n'existe plus aujourd'hui sauf à travers la fréquentation de «La petite maison» (structure d'accueil mère-enfant gérée par l'AFER).

L'atelier de production d'écrits/journal

Le but de cet atelier n'est pas de faire le tour des pratiques en matière d'écrit de la langue française, mais plutôt d'aborder tout le travail qui peut se faire sur l'écrit: technique de résumé, plan, construction d'un texte, etc. Le support principal de cet atelier est le journal. Les stagiaires rédigent des articles qui, une fois terminés, sont rassemblés sous la forme d'un journal, qui est ensuite distribué à l'interne (formateurs, stagiaires), mais également à certaines personnes de l'extérieur. Il ne faut pas forcément savoir écrire pour participer à cet atelier. Chacun y travaille à son rythme même si la date de parution du journal fixe un objectif: «Comment je m'y prends pour que mon article figure dans le prochain journal?» Ceci passe par la construction d'un calendrier, l'organisation du travail, etc.

Dans la démarche, en théorie, un stagiaire passe du support papier-crayon à la publication assistée par ordinateur (PAO). Tous les stagiaires n'abordent pas la PAO, cela serait trop difficile à gérer. Les textes sont retravaillés, on effectue les corrections en groupe. Nous abordons ainsi des règles de grammaire et d'orthographe qui sont plus facilement assimilées lorsque le travail est fait en groupe, avec un texte qui parle aux stagiaires.

Plusieurs possibilités s'offrent aux stagiaires:

— Les stagiaires choisissent un ou plusieurs thèmes communs;

— Chacun choisit le thème qui lui convient le mieux et travaille seul ou avec d'autres autour du même thème;

— Les stagiaires choisissent un sujet tel que leur travail, leur vie, une question d'actualité, et travaillent leur article individuellement.

Lecture

Il est question d'aborder ici les différents écrits de «proximité»: partir de cette base pour intégrer des comportements de lecteur. Il est primordial que les stagiaires en lecture puissent restituer les acquis et les écrits faits dans d'autres ateliers (ce point sera développé ultérieurement). C'est en lecture qu'il est important de les reprendre.

Calcul

En fonction du plan de travail défini au cours de l'entretien d'entrée, le stagiaire participe à cet atelier. Tout d'abord un programme de travail est fixé, puis le stagiaire travaille son programme avec le formateur et dispose de classeurs avec exercices selon le niveau choisi.

D'autres ateliers viennent «alimenter» celui-ci, notamment, l'atelier de cuisine (gestion du budget), de comptabilité, mais encore tout ce à quoi un stagiaire peut avoir à faire face dans sa vie quotidienne et qui lui fait problème.

Techniques de recherche d'emploi (TRE)

Outre l'aspect purement pratique des TRE (CV, lettres, etc.), ce temps d'atelier procède également par l'élaboration de projet, car pour beaucoup, il y a des difficultés à démarrer d'emblée par la rédaction de CV ou de lettres.

Souvent, la démarche utilisée consiste en un aller-retour permanent, l'utilisation des TRE venant valider ou invalider le projet initial. C'est également dans cet atelier que nous pouvons aider les personnes en recherche de formation.

Ces ateliers «à thèmes» sont en rapport étroit avec les ateliers «fonctionnels». Ils n'ont pas la forme de cours où le stagiaire vient s'éclairer à la lanterne du savoir du formateur; il s'agit davantage de trouver ensemble des stratégies et des méthodes afin de faire parvenir les personnes à l'objectif qu'elles se sont fixé en début de formation.

Les ateliers «fonctionnels»

L'objectif de ces ateliers est de faciliter pour les personnes en grande difficulté les apprentissages de base tels que la lecture, le calcul. Ils permettent d'utiliser des supports différents, de susciter l'intérêt pour des réalisations et de faire des retours sur le quotidien.

Ces ateliers (photo, expression, informatique, cuisine) n'ont pas pour objectif de former des photographes ou autres choses, mais de proposer

des «cadres techniques» où, en fonction de son intérêt pour tel ou tel domaine, le stagiaire va essayer de vérifier la pertinence de son projet.

Pour des personnes en grande difficulté, et donc se sentant exclues de toute situation classique d'apprentissage avec papier-crayon, ces ateliers offrent un lieu de réussite et sont souvent déclencheurs d'un processus de revalorisation, cette dernière étant nécessaire pour entreprendre toute formation.

L'évaluation que nous faisons de notre travail fait que nous modifions ces ateliers soit dans leur forme, soit dans leurs contenus ou par l'utilisation d'autres outils. Ces ateliers évoluent également en fonction de la demande des gens et sont donc, bien souvent, en perpétuelle mutation, notamment au cours de la réunion des stagiaires (une fois par mois) où ceux-ci peuvent faire des propositions. Ce temps d'expression est destiné aux stagiaires, qui le gèrent eux-mêmes: nous essayons au maximum que ce soit eux qui animent cette réunion, même si cela pose certains problèmes. Ces temps d'animation peuvent être préparés dans certains ateliers (par exemple, l'atelier d'expression). Une boîte à idées est mise à disposition. Les idées recueillies permettent d'établir l'ordre du jour et elles sont abordées avec le groupe de stagiaires présent à la réunion: questionnements, propositions, etc.

Les ateliers de travail individuel

Les personnes y travaillent de façon autonome et ont au moins une fois par semaine un temps de travail individuel. L'objectif, pour chaque stagiaire, est de réussir à gérer le temps et le rythme de travail, d'utiliser les outils les plus adéquats ou qui lui conviennent le mieux, de ne pas s'éloigner de son projet et de devenir l'acteur de sa formation.

Cette démarche devrait être facilitée par l'existence du livret du stagiaire. Le contenu de ces ateliers est préparé dans les ateliers «à thèmes» et les ateliers «fonctionnels».

Lien entre les ateliers

Ces trois types d'action sont étroitement liés et ne trouvent leur sens que les uns par rapport aux autres. C'est le projet du stagiaire qui doit servir de fil conducteur dans la participation aux ateliers.

Ainsi, les ateliers se répondent entre eux en tant que commanditaires-fournisseurs et assurent aussi un lien dans le parcours du stagiaire. Par exemple, à un moment donné, le groupe de l'atelier de lecture, qui travaille à des écrits quotidiens, a passé une commande à l'atelier de photo

pour avoir une recette en images. Les stagiaires ont explicité leur demande: avoir les différentes étapes d'une recette en photos, avec repérage des différents ingrédients et ustensiles et le nom de ces derniers.

Ces personnes ont donc participé à l'atelier de photo qui s'est transformé en atelier de cuisine-photos; puis les textes et légendes des photos ont été travaillés dans l'atelier de journal et dans le temps de travail individuel; puis les images et le texte ont été assemblés à l'aide de la publication assistée par ordinateur; la recette en images est parue dans le journal puis a été réexploitée dans l'atelier de lecture.

Il est essentiel que le stagiaire, dès l'entretien d'entrée, prenne conscience que sa formation va se construire autour de son projet (même si le projet de formation est la construction de ce dernier). Le projet est évolutif, implique la valorisation des projets intermédiaires. Il permet au stagiaire de mesurer les résultats.

Un atelier, quel qu'il soit, n'a jamais un contenu défini. Il offre au stagiaire des outils différents et des situations différentes afin que celui-ci mène à bien ses objectifs du moment, en ne perdant jamais de vue que ce qu'il a réalisé n'est jamais gratuit, mais que cela s'intègre bien dans la démarche d'un projet, le sien.

3. Des outils pour lutter contre l'illettrisme

Le journal

Depuis la création de l'APP, nous cherchions à mettre en place un temps de formation qui permettrait d'aider les personnes à rédiger. Un temps d'atelier suffisamment ouvert pour que puissent cohabiter des gens maîtrisant l'écrit à des degrés divers, mais également permettant aux textes de trouver des destinataires et, dans le même temps, un sens.

Très vite la forme du journal nous est apparue comme étant la plus adaptée. Un écrit mosaïque, permettant à chacun de donner libre cours à son imagination, en respectant les rythmes de travail de chacun.

Après un long cheminement, des essais, des erreurs, des errances, après de multiples numéros «0» d'une qualité évoluant en même temps que notre matériel et l'arrivée du progrès dans notre lointaine banlieue, nous avons réussi à structurer un atelier permanent et atteint une régularité relative dans la parution du journal.

Concrètement comment cela se passe-t-il?

Tous les mardis matin a lieu l'atelier de production d'écrits. Chaque stagiaire, inscrit ou non dans l'atelier, peut réfléchir et écrire sur un thème

de son choix. Ces textes se retrouveront sous la forme de rubriques dans le journal.

Vient ensuite le temps de la discussion collective où se détermine un thème commun qui paraîtra sous la forme d'un dossier central. La méthode employée est celle du «brainstorming», qui permet ensuite la structuration des idées dans un plan où chacun peut s'inscrire en fonction de l'intérêt pour telle ou telle partie du sujet. Dans ce même temps s'amorcent des débats sur la chose écrite, sur les destinataires de l'écrit.

La phase suivante consiste à rédiger les textes soit dans le cadre de l'atelier, soit dans d'autres ateliers tels que l'atelier de travail individuel, de lecture ou autres (par exemple, dans le cadre d'une recherche documentaire dans la bibliothèque ou bien dans des lieux-ressources extérieurs).

Lorsque l'écrit est rédigé et corrigé (nous procédons en fin de parcours à une correction des dernières erreurs), le texte est saisi sur ordinateur. Nous passons ensuite à l'échange des textes et chacun résume le texte de l'autre de façon à produire un chapeau et à travailler la technique du résumé. Parallèlement à tout cela, une recherche iconographique est proposée de façon que chaque article soit illustré.

Une séance collective permet de préparer une prémaquette qui sera réutilisée dans l'atelier d'initiation à l'informatique comme support à l'apprentissage des logiciels de publication assistée par ordinateur et dessin assisté par ordinateur (PAO/DAO).

Enfin chaque cycle se termine par un débat sur le fond et la forme du dernier numéro. Cette organisation est, bien entendu, théorique et aménagée en fonction des personnes inscrites dans une période donnée. En principe, le processus s'étale sur un mois à un mois et demi.

La structure étant décrite, passons à la série d'outils mise à la disposition des stagiaires.

Outre le temps de discussion-concertation, le papier, le crayon, nous disposons en vrac: du «paper-board», de la photo (développement-tirage), de la vidéo («camescope-montage», fonds documentaire audiovisuel), du minitel (avec la possibilité de récupérer des données sur ordinateur, par exemple en utilisant les dépêches de l'AFP), de la presse, de livres, de magnétophones, d'ordinateurs (PC compatible IBM) équipés de logiciels de traitement de textes, de publication assistée par ordinateur, de dessin assisté par ordinateur, d'un scanner, d'une imprimante laser, d'une photocopieuse, de l'ensemble des autres ateliers et bien entendu de ressources extérieures.

Comme on peut le constater, la structure et les ressources utilisées par cet atelier constituent un outil ouvert, sans cesse en mouvement, au service de l'écrit.

Les didactitiels ELMO (entraînement à la lecture par micro-ordinateur) et MAC 6 (logiciel d'auto-apprentissage des mathématiques)

ELMO sert de support à l'atelier de lecture et est un passage obligé de cet atelier. Cet outil est intéressant dans la mesure où les exercices qu'il peut proposer pour l'entraînement à la lecture sont construits à partir de textes des stagiaires. C'est le stagiaire qui tape son texte, donc le travail passe également par une correction assistée d'un formateur. De plus les résultats sont quantifiables et il est possible d'en analyser les différents aspects avec les stagiaires.

MAC 6 est un support pour l'atelier de mathématiques dans lequel le stagiaire progresse au fur et à mesure des séances, selon le projet et le domaine de travail choisis.

La Bibliothèque-centre de documentation (BCD)

L'intérêt de la BCD est qu'elle propose toute une série de classeurs avec fiches d'exercices autocorrectives selon les domaines et les niveaux de chacun. Elle centralise également des données accessibles aux stagiaires dans les différents domaines qui les concernent.

La conception de la BCD permet aux stagiaires de trouver des réponses, d'utiliser seuls les classeurs en fonction du programme de travail fixé. Bien sûr, cela ne va pas de soi, surtout en début de formation, mais c'est ce vers quoi le stagiaire doit tendre.

Nous travaillons actuellement à mettre au point d'autres outils de formation : un logiciel de gestion des ressources pédagogiques est à l'étude et en expérimentation. Cet outil servira :

— à faciliter et donc à encourager l'usage de la BCD pour un public illettré (qui peut aborder le logiciel par support iconographique) ;

— à restructurer ce lieu grâce à une analyse statistique des fréquences d'utilisation des différents supports ;

— à mettre en corrélation contenus et rythmes de formation et profils des apprenants.

La vidéo

Cet outil est utilisé notamment dans l'atelier d'expression : travail sur un journal télévisé, simulation d'entretiens, etc. Ces temps sont filmés puis réexploités au sein de l'atelier, et ils nécessitent un passage à l'écrit («story-board»).

En projet est également l'aménagement d'un espace audiovisuel fonctionnant en libre-service. Ce projet passe par la constitution d'une vidéothèque et d'une audiothèque dont les ressources serviront de support à l'ensemble des ateliers.

Actions dans d'autres domaines

Fidèles à notre passé (stage d'expression artistique) et à nos intentions de départ (promouvoir, développer tous les moyens propres à la formation sanitaire, sociale, culturelle, etc.), nous cherchons en permanence à nous inscrire dans une recherche de solution à tout enfermement, ce qui comprend les ghettos culturels.

Le désir collectivement partagé à l'AFER est d'intégrer l'expression artistique à toute démarche de formation. Il n'est pas question pour nous, à l'instar de nombreuses pratiques dans le secteur sanitaire et social, d'ériger la culture en outil pédagogico-thérapeutique. Nous essayons de provoquer la rencontre. Nous pensons qu'il existe une différence entre les techniques éducatives occupationnelles ou thérapeutiques et une pratique artistique faisant d'abord appel aux possibilités créatrices que chacun a ou peut avoir, quel que soit son statut social. C'est pourquoi nous essayons de faire intervenir des artistes professionnels dans certaines rencontres organisées:

— Stages d'insertion sociale et professionnelle pour demandeurs d'emploi longue durée coanimés par l'AFER et un metteur en scène;

— Participation aux activités et à l'administration de l'association « Arts et santé », dont le but est de promouvoir les pratiques artistiques auprès des personnes handicapées, âgées et malades;

— Transformation de nos locaux en salles d'exposition et de concert pour la fête de nos dix ans;

— En formation continue des personnels du secteur social, actions de formation où la dimension culturelle trouve place.

Cette sensibilité est présente également au sein de l'APP, où ont pu intervenir:

— un photographe professionnel, dans un atelier de techniques de recherche d'emploi;

— un sculpteur, dans un atelier de lecture-production d'écrits;

— un comédien, qui anime en permanence un atelier d'expression orale en faisant appel aux techniques du théâtre.

Notre réflexion sur l'introduction de la dimension culturelle a trouvé un cadre permanent de réalisation dans la mise en place, par la mairie de Lille et la mission locale des jeunes, du service «crédit loisir». Il s'agit d'inciter nos stagiaires à «consommer» du spectacle (théâtre, concert, cinéma) à un prix dérisoire (10 FF le spectacle) et de réutiliser ces spectacles dans les temps de formation (recherche d'information sur les spectacles, réservations, organisations, rédaction de textes, utilisation de la PAO pour la production d'un numéro spécial du journal des stagiaires).

L'APP est donc en perpétuelle recherche afin d'être plus efficace sur son terrain d'action. Cela ne se fait pas sans difficultés.

La pratique d'autoformation qui est visée se heurte à des difficultés dues notamment:

— à l'évolution du public accueilli: de plus en plus la formation recherchée est une «remise à niveau». Les personnes qui prennent contact avec l'APP ont de moins en moins de perspective immédiate en matière d'insertion. Cet objectif devient pour elles de plus en plus lointain. La volonté de remise à niveau devient pressante mais elle perd en sens. Cela freine le développement des différentes actions possibles en APP, actions non directement liées à la formation, mais qui sont un cadre incontournable pour arriver aux objectifs fixés;

— à la non-rémunération de la formation, qui pose un problème pour les gens qui veulent venir à l'APP, mais qui se voient freinés par le fait que cette formation n'est pas rémunérée. Il est cependant évident que si rémunération il y avait, nous ferions face à d'autres problèmes: les gens ne viendraient pas forcément à l'APP parce que le cadre proposé répondrait à leurs besoins, mais bien parce que leur participation serait rémunérée.

LES DEMANDEURS D'EMPLOI LONGUE DURÉE (DELD)

À la fin des années 1970 commencent à être mis en place des programmes de formation qui s'annoncent comme des moyens de lutte contre le chômage. Ces programmes se sont très vite complexifiés au point où il devint difficile de s'y retrouver dans cette prolifération de mesures, parfois complémentaires, mais faisant aussi parfois double emploi. Ce n'est qu'en 1985 que le programme de formation à l'intention des adultes (plus de 25 ans) s'est réellement structuré, avec la mise en place des stages modulaires.

Un programme spécial se met en place à l'intention d'un public de demandeurs d'emploi de longue durée, composant « le noyau dur » du chômage, qui ne profite même pas des périodes où la situation sur le marché du travail est plus favorable. Ce programme spécial a pour fonction d'opérer un rééquilibrage dans les chances d'accès à l'emploi de ces catégories ou, pour reprendre l'expression de Foudi et Stankiewiez, « d'améliorer leur position dans la file d'attente[3] ».

Ce programme est aujourd'hui géré par les directions départementales pour l'emploi sous l'appellation AIF (Action d'insertion et de formation). Les demandeurs d'emploi touchés par cette dernière mesure ont le statut de stagiaire de la formation professionnelle et sont rémunérés. Ce programme a trois fonctions :

— Ralentir le processus d'exclusion et de marginalisation, la logique d'assistance pouvant prendre le pas sur la logique du placement pour une partie du public ;

— Augmenter l'« employabilité intrinsèque » du demandeur d'emploi par une formation orientée vers la resocialisation, la motivation et les techniques de recherche d'emploi ;

— Augmenter la qualification afin de réduire le décalage entre la qualification du demandeur d'emploi et celle du poste de travail.

Le public

Une étude récente de la Direction départementale du travail et de l'emploi a tenté de dresser une typologie des demandeurs d'emploi longue durée accueillis dans le programme AIF sur le versant nord-est de Lille :

Type 1 : Des plus de 40 ans, qui ont perdu un emploi stable, souvent à la suite d'un licenciement économique. Selon leur compétence sociale, ces individus ont pu, avec plus ou moins de bonheur, se reconvertir dans l'emploi temporaire : la raréfaction des emplois non qualifiés sur ce marché particulier et la concurrence de jeunes soutenus par le programme les a tous fait entrer dans le chômage total.

Type 2 : Des moins de 40 ans surtout, qui devaient obtenir un emploi stable, dont le redéploiement des emplois industriels les a privés. Selon leur compétence sociale, fortement liée au niveau de culture générale, ils ont pu vivre ou survivre grâce à des emplois temporaires, ou n'ont parfois jamais obtenu d'emploi (ou jamais travaillé pendant une durée suffisante pour donner des droits).

Type 3: Des femmes surtout, souvent issues de l'immigration. Sachant rarement lire et écrire, ayant de grosses difficultés d'expression orale, elles n'ont aucune expérience professionnelle. L'entrée en chômage du conjoint ou des parents, l'impossibilité pour les enfants de trouver un emploi les projettent sur le marché du travail.

Type 4: Des hommes de moins de 40 ans surtout, issus de l'immigration, qui sont conscients de l'impossibilité de trouver un emploi et pour qui l'expérience de leurs aînés cesse d'être un modèle. Ils sont vraisemblablement en rupture avec le système de valeurs dominant qui accorde une place importante au travail. Ils exploitent les possibilités (les seules) que leur offre «le système», à savoir «les stages», qu'ils tendent à substituer à l'emploi.

Type 5: Des hommes de plus de 35 ans n'ayant jamais eu d'emploi stable. Issus de la frange la plus prolétarisée de la classe ouvrière, ils ont grandi dans la précarité (familles à problèmes graves, assistance sociale, foyer pour l'enfance, etc.). Ils partagent le système de valeurs de la classe ouvrière: attachement à l'organisation patriarcale de la famille, attachement à la «valeur travail», mais c'est ici le «travail au noir» qui est survalorisé. Tous ne peuvent pas être qualifiés d'illettrés, mais la grande majorité d'entre eux ont des difficultés à l'écrit.

Quelques aspects de notre action

La pédagogie que nous mettons en pratique dans la filière «insertion» s'inscrit dans la démarche déjà décrite de mise en place d'un processus d'autoformation individuelle et collective visant l'autonomie des groupes et des individus.

Dans un contexte d'autoformation visant l'insertion professionnelle, les situations expérientielles nécessitant le recours à l'écrit sont multiples: la lecture de l'annuaire téléphonique pour prendre des rendez-vous, des plaques de rues pour se rendre quelque part, des papiers administratifs, des petites annonces pour les offres d'emploi, etc. Nous essayons au maximum, dans l'ensemble des séquences de formation, de mettre en place des situations qui nécessitent un contact direct entre le sujet et l'écrit et qui débouche normalement sur l'action (apprendre à lire).

Le groupe

La pédagogie d'autoformation et de responsabilisation des individus que nous pratiquons fait jouer au groupe en formation un rôle important. On pourrait penser que l'autoformation, en renforçant la qualité d'individu au détriment de celle de membre d'un groupe, vide de son contenu la notion même de groupe. Il n'en est rien. Notre pédagogie est fondée

sur la négociation: d'une part, les formateurs doivent emporter l'adhésion des formés sur ce qu'ils proposent, ce qui les oblige à prendre en considération à tout moment le projet de chacun. D'autre part, les formés ne peuvent obtenir le concours des formateurs que s'ils font la preuve que ce concours servira leur projet. Cette démarche introduit des rapports d'équilibre: plus les membres d'un groupe sont faibles, plus le groupe ressemble à une bande de «potaches»; plus ils sont forts, plus le groupe s'apparente à un ensemble d'acteurs sociaux.

En rendant les stagiaires responsables de l'espace-temps de la formation, nous leur donnons de fait prise sur toutes ses dimensions. La gestion des contraintes de temps, d'espace, de moyens, de prise en considération de l'environnement (règles sociales et administratives, par exemple) n'est plus du seul ressort des formateurs. Par la situation de responsabilisation, les contraintes concernent de la même manière formateurs et formés, d'où la nécessité de leur gestion commune. La gestion de contraintes de tous ordres favorise la relation à l'écrit des stagiaires dans la mesure où ils ont à argumenter, à prouver, à justifier des prises de position pour pouvoir intervenir directement et en grandeur réelle dans la résolution des problèmes.

L'effet de socialisation que le groupe et que cette démarche pédagogique apportent à l'individu est capital. La personne y puise la conscience de sa différence. Elle y trouve les échos extérieurs indispensables à l'élaboration de son projet. Elle en tire enfin la conscience de son appartenance sociale.

La formation en alternance

L'action de formation ne se déroule pas uniquement en centre de formation, mais également, pour des durées plus ou moins longues, dans les entreprises. Cette situation de formation en alternance offre des moments privilégiés de relation à l'écrit.

Le stagiaire a, dans un premier temps, à faire face à la recherche d'une entreprise qui pourrait l'accueillir. Cette recherche nécessite un recours à l'écrit incontournable (annuaire téléphonique ou d'entreprises, courrier de candidature, enquêtes sur les entreprises qui peuvent offrir de l'emploi, etc.). Pour l'individu qui cherche un emploi, cette relation à l'écrit prend un sens, car elle s'appuie sur les «écrits réels» dont il a besoin et non pas sur d'artificiels exercices.

Une réponse positive, après diverses démarches de recherche de stage, donne tout son sens au nécessaire recours à l'écrit, et ce beaucoup plus sûrement que n'importe quel discours théorique sur la formation.

Les périodes passées en entreprise sont également l'occasion d'être en contact avec une multitude d'écrits: instructions pour le fonctionnement des machines, consignes de travail, bons de commande, règlement intérieur, rapport de stage, etc.

Les commandes sociales

À travers un réseau de partenaires regroupés au sein de groupes de pilotage des actions (bibliothécaires, salariés d'associations socioculturelles, travailleurs sociaux, représentants d'entreprises), nous essayons de trouver des demandes de production pour les stagiaires. Il n'est pas nécessaire que la production soit très importante, mais elle doit être déterminée par une commande reposant sur un réel besoin.

Quand un établissement ou un organisme est ainsi en relation de partenariat avec des groupes en formation dont l'objectif est de produire, c'est qu'il reconnaît leur compétence à produire, à travailler. Cette reconnaissance est une condition favorable à l'apprentissage, qui évite la dérive de la pédagogisation des productions où le «faire-semblant» prime.

Ces commandes sociales, par les contraintes claires (de temps, de rendement) qui doivent être définies, par l'aide technique qu'elles nécessitent (ateliers de lecture, d'écriture, d'enquête, d'expression) et par la participation nécessaire de chacun, donnent du sens, à court terme, dans le temps de la formation, à un réel projet de travail.

Ce système de commandes sociales est récent pour nous. En voici deux exemples:

— Une commande d'articles pour un magazine (*Médiatec*) sur le contenu de leur stage, adressé à un groupe de stagiaires en démarche de lecturisation. Ces articles sont destinés à sensibiliser un public plus large sur la formation;

— Une association qui a le projet d'ouvrir un lieu-ressource de documentation a demandé aux stagiaires d'établir une liste de documents qu'eux, non-lecteurs, souhaiteraient y trouver.

CONCLUSION

Depuis la création et la mise en place de l'Atelier pédagogique personnalisé, l'AFER, par son extension et par le territoire d'action, reconnu, qu'elle a su s'assurer, est entrée dans un processus d'institutionnalisation.

Les spécialistes de l'analyse institutionnelle ont montré que l'institutionnalisation traduit l'échec de la prophétie, c'est-à-dire l'abandon du

projet initial de type « révolutionnaire » dont le mouvement était porteur, même si cet abandon n'est pas toujours explicite et qu'il est parfois accompagné d'un simulacre de réalisation destiné à le rendre acceptable pour les participants. (Il est intéressant à cet égard de relever le nombre de débats sur le sens qui occupent l'association aujourd'hui. Lorsque l'on éprouve un tel besoin de réfléchir sur le sens, c'est qu'il n'y en a déjà plus beaucoup !)

Le danger est grand pour nous aujourd'hui de nous mouler dans les cadres institutionnels de la formation au nom d'une compétence professionnelle reconnue et au détriment de l'innovation et de notre idéologie de départ, qui risquent même d'être totalement laissées de côté.

Notre action dans le cadre de la lutte contre l'illettrisme ne peut faire abstraction d'un choix idéologique et politique. Le problème de l'illettrisme dépasse largement le cadre du « pédagogisme » et des simples réponses techniques. « Une société ne sécrète que le nombre de lecteurs dont elle a besoin. C'est seulement en se transformant qu'elle ouvre les conditions pour de nouveaux partages. Une action pour la lecture commence donc par une évolution du jeu social afin de responsabiliser les gens dans leur travail, dans leurs loisirs, dans leur vie sociale. Un groupe qui vit est un groupe qui lit et non l'inverse[4]. »

Depuis 15 ans, notre société change, évolue, les projets « alternatifs » des années 1980 et les discours idéologiques dont ils étaient porteurs ne font plus guère recette. Les organisations politiques et le mouvement syndical se disloquent, de nouvelles formes de solidarité naissent, de nouvelles formes d'exclusion aussi...

Comment, à l'heure où en France la question de l'enfermement se pose de manière bien plus cruciale — et plus sournoise — qu'il y a 15 ans (les débats portaient à l'époque sur l'ouverture des hôpitaux psychiatriques alors qu'aujourd'hui commencent à poindre des « ghettos » pour demandeurs d'emploi longue durée), pouvons-nous rester cohérents avec l'objectif qui a été à l'origine de notre association : « proposer des choix de formation allant dans le sens d'une solution à tout enfermement » ?

Les réponses que nous pourrons apporter à cette question sont vitales pour nous aujourd'hui, car l'analyse institutionnelle a montré qu'à terme dans un processus d'institutionnalisation le seul moyen d'échapper à la contradiction inhérente à ce processus est l'autodissolution.

Nous avons tenté d'apporter une forme de réponse par une « restructuration » de notre association, mais cela, nous en avons conscience, peut au plus nous apporter une meilleure organisation structurelle.

Il n'est plus possible de nous reposer uniquement sur la compétence qui est la nôtre aujourd'hui et sur la bonne gestion de notre association.

Il nous faut pouvoir poser la question du pourquoi de notre existence en prenant position dans les « débats politiques » qui agitent notre société, et tenter ainsi de retrouver la dynamique qui a été la nôtre tout au long de notre histoire et qui nous a permis — il nous semble — de trouver sur le terrain de la formation des réponses adaptées à la lutte contre toutes les formes d'exclusion.

Nous pensons que la lutte contre l'illettrisme et contre toutes les formes d'enfermement n'est pas un combat d'arrière-garde, bien au contraire, et nous entendons continuer à y jouer un rôle. Nous nous en donnerons les moyens.

NOTES

1. Foucambert, Jean, *Les sept propositions*, feuillets ronéotypés, 1986.

2. Pineau, Gaston, «Les possibles de l'autoformation», *Éducation permanente*, n° 44, octobre 1978.

3. Foudi et Stankiewiez, «La lutte contre le chômage de longue durée ou l'émergence d'une politique autonome», *Revue française des affaires sociales*, n° 3, 1987.

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DE L'ANIMATION SPÉCIALISÉE À L'ALPHABÉTISATION POPULAIRE

Louise Meunier
Mario Raymond
La Porte ouverte
Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Québec

La Porte ouverte est un organisme autonome d'alphabétisation qui travaille au Québec, à Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu et dans les villes environnantes. Au début, en 1984, et ce jusqu'en 1987, La Porte ouverte ne travaillait qu'à la préalphabétisation (sensibilisation-recrutement). Depuis octobre 1988, l'organisme s'occupe des trois étapes de l'alphabétisation: préalphabétisation, alphabétisation, postalphabétisation, et offre des ateliers de français et de calcul à la population du Haut-Richelieu.

Née de la volonté d'un groupe d'éducateurs du service d'éducation des adultes (SEA) de la Commission scolaire régionale Honoré-Mercier de charger des personnes du milieu de la préalphabétisation, La Porte ouverte s'est lentement transformée en un groupe populaire autonome. C'est cette évolution de La Porte ouverte qui est relatée dans le présent chapitre.

UN PLAN GLOBAL D'ALPHABÉTISATION

Avant 1978, les demandes individuelles d'alphabétisation à la Commission scolaire Honoré-Mercier étaient acheminées à la Commission scolaire de Chambly. En 1978, devant l'accroissement de la demande, le SEA crée un cours de français de base. C'est en faisant ces premières expériences que l'on découvre l'importance de faire participer le milieu à l'alphabétisation, surtout le recrutement.

Un plan d'action est alors présenté par la Commission scolaire Honoré-Mercier au ministère de l'Éducation, plan qui vise deux objectifs: faire financer des activités de formation et surtout préparer les organismes et les personnes du milieu à la prise en charge des volets pré et postalphabétisation. On considère alors, à juste titre, que ces organismes, tout comme les bénévoles du milieu, sont les mieux placés pour pénétrer les secteurs les plus défavorisés et entrer en contact avec les personnes analphabètes.

En 1982, le plan est mis en œuvre. Le SEA embauche une animatrice à plein temps pour mettre sur pied des comités bénévoles chargés d'introduire l'alphabétisation dans chacune des localités du territoire de la commission scolaire. Son rôle consiste à chercher des leaders dans chacune des communautés locales. On vise, en bout de ligne, la prise en charge par des «comités alpha» locaux de toutes les dimensions non pédagogiques de l'alphabétisation.

Le SEA définit un modèle, dit «terminal», de partage des tâches et des responsabilités entre le milieu et le SEA. Selon ce modèle, dans chaque localité, un «comité alpha» local prend en charge (responsabilité et leadership) l'*opération globale*: planification, organisation, gestion et financement en ce qui a trait essentiellement aux activités de pré et postalphabétisation. Ce comité local est formé de personnes-ressources du milieu. Le SEA constitue, pour sa part, la ressource pédagogique (enseignement, programme, etc.) et il assure le financement de la formation dans la limite de son budget. «Le comité local peut, sur son initiative, organiser et réaliser des activités pédagogiques complémentaires au travail du professeur, idéalement de concert avec ce dernier (activités culturelles, action sociale, conscientisation, activités fonctionnelles, etc.)[1].»

Le modèle «terminal» dont on s'inspirera

Le modèle «terminal» précise les champs d'action de chacun des partenaires. Le groupe choisi (idéalement un comité alpha local) est chargé de l'opération globale, tandis que le SEA prend en charge un aspect de l'opération, l'aspect pédagogique. Les comités alpha sont ainsi chargés de sensibiliser le milieu, d'assurer le dépistage et l'accueil des personnes analphabètes, puis de tenter de les amener au cours de français élémentaire.

Les questions à caractère pédagogique (étude des besoins, formation, suivi pédagogique, évaluation des apprentissages, embauche des formatrices) relèvent de la seule compétence du SEA. Celui-ci se réserve un droit de regard sur les activités des comités alpha. Le seul volet où les comités ont une autonomie pleine et entière est le financement, qui doit être recherché «ailleurs qu'au SEA».

Le SEA signale néanmoins certains risques au partage des tâches et des responsabilités avec des organismes issus du milieu:

«Comme les autres organismes, associations ou services du milieu, le SEA a *son* mandat spécifique, *son* expertise et *sa* responsabilité [...] qu'il doit assumer et non renvoyer à d'autres dans le milieu [...] N.B.: En amenant «le milieu» à collaborer sans limites à ce mandat spécifique, à cette expertise et à cette responsabilité, il se produit, à partir d'un certain moment, le curieux phénomène de la mise sur pied d'une structure parallèle avec éventuellement cadres et employés rémunérés[2]...»

Les comités alpha se forment autour d'une personne qui en assure la direction du fait que c'est également la formatrice engagée par la commission scolaire pour donner les cours d'alphabétisation. Les personnes «piliers», secondées par l'animatrice, réussissent à créer un noyau d'action bien implanté dans certaines localités, du moins assez pour alimenter quelques classes d'alphabétisation pendant quelques années. Les comités alpha

formés selon cette démarche effectuent un recrutement systématique des personnes analphabètes de la région. Ils ne disposent d'aucun budget et travaillent bénévolement à l'organisation d'activités pour les participants recrutés.

Pour la commission scolaire, le résultat est tout à fait satisfaisant. Elle prévoit retirer son animatrice après trois ans. Le salaire pour le poste de formatrice, lié au nombre d'inscriptions, constituera alors sa seule contribution financière. Ce plan devrait permettre, à moyen terme, d'apprendre à lire à un bon nombre d'analphabètes complets et de maintenir un certain nombre de classes d'alphabétisation, grâce auxquelles les personnes sous-scolarisées auront, en principe, la possibilité d'apprendre un métier ou de faire des études secondaires à l'éducation des adultes.

À Saint-Jean, le plan ne sera pas appliqué de la même manière, compte tenu du fait que le milieu urbain est plus impersonnel et que la population est plus nombreuse. Dans les premières étapes du recrutement, le SEA parvient rapidement à ouvrir quelques classes d'alphabétisation. Conséquemment, plusieurs formatrices sont engagées pour donner cet enseignement le soir à la polyvalente. Ces formatrices n'ont pas, contrairement à celles qui travaillent en région, participé à la mise sur pied de comités alpha, car la situation ne l'exigeait pas. On sait que le SEA craignait, à cette époque, la mise sur pied d'un organisme parallèle qui aurait empiété sur sa mission éducative.

Par ailleurs, les animateurs engagés pour trouver les participants aux classes d'alphabétisation ont tôt fait d'épuiser les pistes de recrutement. Comme ils n'exercent aucun contrôle après cette étape, ils peuvent difficilement évaluer l'efficacité de leur travail. Quand le recrutement ne donne plus de résultats, les animateurs sont démobilisés.

Premières actions

La première action s'inspirant du modèle « terminal » a lieu en 1982 à Farnham. Le SEA recrute une petite équipe de bénévoles qui auront à sensibiliser le milieu et à recruter des personnes analphabètes. Soixante-quatorze personnes sont recrutées et 46 entreprennent une formation à l'automne de 1982. On crée le comité de l'EDA (Éducation des analphabètes, devenu plus tard Éducation des adultes).

La même année, une action similaire a lieu à Marieville. Des leaders du milieu mettent sur pied le CALM (Comité d'alphabétisation local de Marieville), qui entreprend rapidement son travail de préalphabétisation. Soixante-trois personnes analphabètes sont recrutées et 28 commencent une formation à la session d'hiver de 1982.

Peu à peu, les personnes-ressources du SEA se retirent des comités (EDA et CALM) pour leur laisser le champ libre. Un travail de sensibilisation est entrepris aussi à Saint-Jean. Le SEA recrute 128 personnes, dont 105 commencent une formation à l'automne de 1983. À la fin de l'année, on recommande la création d'un comité alpha local à Saint-Jean qui prendrait l'opération en main.

Naissance de La Porte ouverte

Les personnes-ressources du SEA qui ont aidé à mettre sur pied les comités alpha de Farnham et de Marieville présentent une demande de subvention, dans le cadre des programmes d'emploi du gouvernement fédéral, pour assurer la sensibilisation du public et le recrutement de personnes analphabètes dans les villes de Saint-Jean, d'Iberville ainsi que dans la région (plus de 56 000 habitants). Parrainé par Relado, organisme d'aide aux adolescents, la subvention est accordée et le projet mis en place à la fin de 1983. Cette période constitue à proprement parler l'étape pionnière de l'alphabétisation à Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu.

Trois «animatrices-terrain» sont embauchées pour une période de six mois. Elles doivent sensibiliser le public à l'analphabétisme et recruter des personnes analphabètes qui seront invitées à s'inscrire aux activités d'alphabétisation du SEA. Un véritable travail de défrichage est entrepris. À peu près toutes les méthodes de sensibilisation du milieu sont expérimentées (porte à porte, rencontres à domicile, feuillets dans les enveloppes de paie, etc.). Les résultats sont probants: 177 personnes sont rejointes et entreprennent une formation à la session d'hiver de 1984.

En 1984, le SEA envisage plus sérieusement de mettre sur pied un comité alpha local à Saint-Jean. Son rôle serait conforme au modèle «terminal» de 1982. Un comité provisoire est formé. Mais contrairement à ce qui a lieu à Farnham et à Marieville, ce ne sont pas des leaders du milieu qui forment le comité, mais des membres du SEA (animatrices, formatrices, personnes-ressources). Deux noms sont proposés: «À Livre ouvert» et «La Porte ouverte». C'est le second qui sera choisi.

La Porte ouverte est constituée en association de promotion de l'alphabétisation. Son mandat se limite strictement à la promotion du programme d'alphabétisation du SEA, sans intervention aucune dans le champ de la formation. La charte constitutive de l'organisme est d'ailleurs très claire: «*OBJECTIF GÉNÉRAL*: promouvoir le programme d'alphabétisation par des activités autres que la formation (domaine réservé à l'éducation des adultes)[1].»

La Porte ouverte est, à cette époque, un rejeton du SEA plutôt qu'un groupe populaire de Saint-Jean. La Porte ouverte est au mieux un appendice

du SEA chargé de financer de façon autonome la préalphabétisation, activité qui n'est pas directement financée par le ministère de l'Éducation. On lui accorde pleine marge de manœuvre, mais on n'arrive pas à la doter de moyens propres à rendre ses activités permanentes. Ce problème demeure entier encore aujourd'hui.

LE FINANCEMENT DES ACTIVITÉS DE PRÉALPHABÉTISATION

La commission scolaire et les organismes du milieu sont unanimes à considérer la préalphabétisation comme un préalable nécessaire, voire indispensable à la formation. Il est donc de première importance d'assurer la réussite de cette action qui incombe entièrement, dès 1985, à La Porte ouverte. Comment un organisme embryonnaire comme La Porte ouverte peut-il prendre en charge de si lourdes responsabilités? Le mandat confié à La Porte ouverte est énorme: prendre racine dans une population répartie dans 11 municipalités et comptant près de 60 000 habitants, dont pas moins de 15 000 adultes considérés comme analphabètes à divers degrés.

Pour se faire connaître, La Porte ouverte doit se doter d'une personnalité propre, distincte de la commission scolaire. Mais comment faire quand les membres de l'organisme sont pour la plupart également employés de la commission scolaire et que l'organisme lui-même est logé dans ses quartiers? Les bailleurs de fonds comprennent mal qu'un organisme populaire sollicite leur aide financière pour des activités relevant de la commission scolaire. Ils comprennent mal que La Porte ouverte n'adresse pas ses demandes au SEA, principal bénéficiaire de ses actions dans le milieu.

Pour ces différentes raisons, la sollicitation financière directe du milieu se révélera un échec. Restaient les gouvernements. À Québec, le programme d'aide aux organismes volontaires d'éducation populaire (OVEP), seule source de financement possible, était sous le coup d'un moratoire. La dernière planche de salut était les programmes de création d'emplois du gouvernement fédéral. C'est grâce à ceux-ci que La Porte ouverte réussira à faire financer la majeure partie de ses actions.

De tels programmes ne sont malheureusement pas sans inconvénients. Leur objectif n'est pas de soutenir les organismes subventionnés, mais d'assurer le développement de l'employabilité des participants en leur donnant une formation et une expérience de travail. Les organismes capables de mieux former et éventuellement d'embaucher les participants sont évidemment favorisés. La Porte ouverte, dont les bases demeurent fragiles et qui ne peut même pas embaucher ses propres membres, partait dans le peloton de queue.

Malgré tout, l'organisme a réussi à s'assurer au moins une subvention de ce type chaque année. Mais il s'agit chaque fois d'emplois

temporaires. Tout au plus ces emplois permettent-ils à La Porte ouverte d'assurer une action à plein temps six mois par année, les autres six mois devant être à la charge des «permanents bénévoles». Certains d'entre eux pourront, dans le meilleur des cas, s'assurer d'une charge de cours d'alphabétisation au SEA.

Comme on le note en 1987, «pour des organismes intervenant en alphabétisation, le financement fragmentaire par le biais des programmes de développement de l'emploi n'est évidemment pas l'idéal. Il ne permet pas d'assurer une permanence et empêche toute forme de suivi dans l'intervention. Le bénévolat peut toujours pallier les carences, mais celui-ci s'essouffle rapidement et les besoins de la clientèle analphabète n'en sont pas moins tout aussi pressants[4].» «Le travail est ainsi chaque fois à recommencer, et toujours pour une période de temps limitée[5].»

Étant donné la nature des programmes fédéraux d'emploi temporaire, les travailleurs doivent nécessairement être des chômeurs de longue date. Ils viennent à La Porte ouverte d'abord pour acquérir une expérience de travail qui leur permettra de trouver un emploi ailleurs une fois le projet terminé. Il en résulte ainsi, au fil des ans, un incessant roulement de personnel et, nécessairement, une instabilité dans l'action d'alphabétisation. (De 1983 à 1989, pas moins de 13 personnes ont occupé le poste d'animateur-terrain à La Porte ouverte.)

La tâche des bénévoles n'en devient que plus lourde. Ils doivent faire le travail entre les projets, et ils doivent encore rédiger chaque année une nouvelle demande de subvention. Lorsqu'ils reçoivent une réponse positive, ils doivent se charger de la formation des nouveaux venus, presque toujours des novices de l'alphabétisation. Cette situation est beaucoup trop exigeante pour des bénévoles, qui n'ont pas autant d'intérêt pour l'alphabétisation que les formatrices.

Ainsi, l'année 1985 est marquée par une profonde démobilisation des bénévoles. Tant les formatrices du SEA que les auxiliaires en classe se retirent de La Porte ouverte pour la laisser entre les mains des animateurs-terrain contractuels et des membres restants du conseil d'administration (pour la plupart des personnes analphabètes). Cette démobilisation générale durera trois années, pendant lesquelles une poignée d'individus tenaces tiendront le flambeau de l'alphabétisation. Elle ne prendra fin qu'au moment où La Porte ouverte décidera de réorienter son action.

Malgré tout, le travail sur le terrain entrepris au cours de toutes ces années produira des résultats tangibles et dotera La Porte ouverte d'un savoir-faire reconnu en préalphabétisation.

PRATIQUES D'ANIMATION SUR LE TERRAIN

La Porte ouverte s'est fait reconnaître dans les milieux de l'alphabétisation comme spécialiste de la préalphabétisation. Avec 7 années de travail sur le terrain à son actif et l'expérience de pas moins de 13 animateurs-terrain, La Porte ouverte a pu acquérir un réel savoir-faire. Nous allons maintenant parler des diverses activités d'animation du milieu qui ont été faites depuis le début et des résultats obtenus, en suivant un ordre chronologique.

Le mandat des animateurs-terrain comprend la sensibilisation du milieu et le recrutement des personnes analphabètes pour les cours d'alphabétisation du SEA. En 1988, s'ajouteront à ce mandat les démarches nécessaires à l'autonomisation de La Porte ouverte par rapport au SEA.

1983-1984: étape pionnière

L'année 1983 marque les débuts d'une prise en charge par les organismes du secteur «préalpha». C'est la première fois qu'à Saint-Jean des animateurs de l'extérieur de la commission scolaire travaillent de façon autonome sur le terrain. De 1981 à 1982, une petite opération de publicité avait suffi pour recruter assez de personnes pour les cours d'alphabétisation, le SEA ne pouvant en accueillir plus au risque de connaître un déficit budgétaire.

En 1983, trois animatrices sont embauchées par le moyen d'un programme fédéral (projet Relais) pour 23 semaines de travail sur le terrain. Leur premier mandat allait requérir une longue période de préparation et leur réserver quelques surprises: «À notre grande surprise, la majorité des gens se montraient incrédules devant nos affirmations et les statistiques fournies[6].»

Après quatre semaines de préparation, elles partent sur le terrain. Tous les organismes sont joints. Le premier contact est téléphonique; on sensibilise d'abord à l'alphabétisation, on demande un rendez-vous et, pendant la rencontre, on sollicite une collaboration spéciale (faire circuler de la publicité, organiser des rencontres d'information et, dans certains cas, dresser une liste de personnes qui pourraient être analphabètes). On vise ainsi à joindre le plus de gens possible dans la communauté. Il importe de *percer le milieu*.

En bout de ligne, pas moins de 613 endroits sont contactés et 677 personnes sont rencontrées. Les résultats en ce qui a trait au recrutement sont probants: 192 personnes sont jointes et 177 s'inscrivent aux cours d'alphabétisation à la session d'hiver de 1984.

Le nombre de personnes recrutées peut paraître impressionnant au regard du temps consacré à l'opération (23 semaines). S'il restait encore beaucoup à faire dans le milieu, au moins l'analphabétisme n'était plus vu comme étant l'affaire du tiers monde... Il existait bel et bien chez nous, tous en avaient pris conscience, et l'alphabétisation devenait l'affaire de la communauté.

1984-1985 : cibler l'action

Après quelques mois d'interruption du travail sur le terrain — faute de financement — La Porte ouverte réussit à s'assurer les services d'une nouvelle équipe grâce à un autre programme d'emploi (Article 38). Deux animateurs et une animatrice sont embauchés pour une période de 20 semaines. Ils ont sensiblement les mêmes objectifs que dans le projet précédent : la sensibilisation de la population en général et le recrutement pour la session d'hiver de 1985. Dans ce mandat, l'équipe privilégie diverses pistes d'action :

— « Favoriser le développement d'un point de service Alpha à Lacolle ;

— Retracer la clientèle des jeunes sans-emploi, ex-élèves et décrocheurs ;

— Amorcer une intervention dans le centre-ville de Saint-Jean. »

L'action de La Porte ouverte se systématise tant dans les cibles choisies que dans l'évaluation des activités. Le rapport d'activités se termine par quelques commentaires généraux, recommandations et pistes à suivre pour un prochain projet. On pense alors déjà à la continuité.

Une attention particulière est portée aux jeunes. On veut joindre surtout les jeunes sans-emploi, anciens élèves ou décrocheurs du professionnel court et des classes spéciales. Près d'une dizaine de jeunes manifestent de l'intérêt pour les cours ou s'y inscrivent. Mais on se rend compte que la plupart de ceux qui s'inscrivent travaillent et ont peu de temps à consacrer à des cours, de quelque nature qu'ils soient. Et le mauvais souvenir de l'école en effraye plus d'un.

On entreprend également de créer un point de service à Lacolle, petite municipalité rurale. La même année, un nouveau projet de création d'emplois est obtenu. Deux des animateurs du projet précédent demeurent en poste, une troisième personne se joint à l'équipe. Le travail sur le terrain se poursuit. On tente l'expérience des rencontres de cuisine en milieu rural, qui s'avèrent un excellent moyen de sensibilisation.

1985-1986 : l'«entre-projets»

De l'automne de 1985 à l'hiver de 1986, on traverse une période de grand vide. On a épuisé les programmes fédéraux, seule source de financement disponible à cette époque. La Porte ouverte présente au SEA une demande de financement transitoire, en attendant un nouveau projet. Les responsables du SEA acceptent, mais à la condition que La Porte ouverte assume le travail sur le terrain sur l'ensemble du territoire de la commission scolaire (principalement à Saint-Jean et Lacolle, à Farnham et Marieville).

Les deux animateurs qui restent acceptent la proposition du SEA, mais se rendent rapidement compte que «la contribution du SEA ne permet pas de mener à court terme une intervention sérieuse dans chaque région[7]». On choisit donc de mener une action concertée qui permette de présenter un projet de subvention commun, devant doter chaque localité d'un animateur et la région d'un coordonnateur du travail sur le terrain.

Pendant ce temps, chaque comité alpha local, avec l'aide des animateurs de La Porte ouverte, poursuit une activité minimale de sensibilisation du milieu. À Marieville, Farnham et Lacolle, on rencontre quelques groupes communautaires. À Saint-Jean, on entreprend de créer un atelier pratique, portant sur le travail, le logement, la formation à l'intention des jeunes assistés sociaux en collaboration avec le centre Travail-Québec. Ce projet devra malheureusement être abandonné par les animateurs, faute de temps.

Une évidence s'impose rapidement à tous : le milieu rural n'a rien à voir avec le milieu urbain. Aux réunions annuelles, où chaque comité local est représenté, on constate qu'il y a des animateurs professionnels à Saint-Jean et des formatrices (semi-bénévoles) en région. Une crise de leadership surgit rapidement, crise qui confirme clairement l'échec de la méthode de la SEA «en ville».

1986 : vers la complémentarité des services

Un nouveau projet de création d'emplois, d'envergure régionale, est obtenu. «Ce projet de subvention fédérale a été demandé pour donner aux régions une employée à plein temps. Mais il s'agit d'un emploi temporaire. Ces employées seront encadrées par les comités locaux et elles pourraient réfléchir, participer à notre avenir à court terme, et non pas seulement faire du recrutement pour la session d'automne 1986[8].»

Cinq personnes sont embauchées. Leur mandat, qui dépasse largement la sensibilisation et le recrutement, est d'apporter du sang neuf dans chacun des comités, d'en devenir membre à part entière, de travailler autant au comité que dans le milieu.

À Saint-Jean, les résultats, après trois années de préalphabétisation, sont inquiétants. Le recrutement est en chute libre. L'heure est à la démobilisation au conseil d'administration de La Porte ouverte. Les formatrices — toutes à l'emploi du SEA — se retirent peu à peu, laissant l'organisme entre les mains des animateurs. La Porte ouverte devient soudain, à l'image de ses responsables, un organisme temporaire. En fait, «l'organisme La Porte ouverte ne vit plus entre les sessions de cours[9]».

Cette constatation conduit, dès 1985, à une remise en question fondamentale de l'action de l'organisme: «La Porte ouverte, en offrant le service d'un autre organisme, a de la difficulté à se faire connaître et ne figure pas sur les listes d'organismes communautaires reconnus. Étant donné la situation, nous pensons que la suite à donner au projet de sensibilisation est de se concentrer sur la mise sur pied d'activités concrètes répondant directement aux besoins de la population[9].»

Il était devenu essentiel pour La Porte ouverte de créer son propre service d'alphabétisation, afin de se faire reconnaître dans le milieu et d'avoir une existence distincte. La Porte ouverte n'existe que pour d'autres: la commission scolaire, et surtout ses formatrices, qui profitent de son recrutement pour se créer des emplois. L'organisme se cherche une identité afin de briser ce cercle vicieux.

Pourquoi travailler pour la commission scolaire, qui ne peut pas la financer et ne lui reconnaît aucune compétence? Simplement parce que la commission scolaire est encore le seul organisme qui, en matière d'éducation, est crédible dans le milieu. S'aliéner le SEA aurait été un suicide. Il fallait petit à petit mettre sur pied une action qui, avec le temps, lui deviendrait essentielle. Les premières démarches dans le centre-ville de Saint-Jean, les débuts de sensibilisation dans les entreprises, les ateliers pratiques auprès des jeunes sont autant de tentatives de l'organisme pour se «caractériser» dans les milieux où n'agit pas la commission scolaire et ainsi acquérir ses lettres de noblesse *en complémentarité* avec celle-ci.

L'animateur en poste et le coordonnateur régional entreprennent de mettre sur pied un service d'accueil à l'intention des personnes analphabètes dépistées. Ce service consiste, d'une part , à «assurer l'accueil de l'individu (particulièrement au local du groupe) de façon à créer un certain climat de détente plus propice à un échange véritable[5]». Il se présente comme une solution de rechange à l'accueil dépersonnalisé de la commission scolaire. Les besoins de l'individu, tant linguistiques qu'affectifs ou sociaux, y sont analysés. Les cours d'alphabétisation sont offerts pour répondre aux besoins de lecture et d'écriture. D'autre part, des ressources communautaires complémentaires sont aussi proposées lorsque d'autres problèmes ont été décelés (alcoolisme, toxicomanie, violence conjugale, etc.).

Le service d'accueil et d'aide relevant jusqu'alors exclusivement de la commission scolaire, il faut obtenir des autorités du SEA la «permission» de l'offrir. Et la chose ne s'avère pas facile...

Les membres de La Porte ouverte font valoir au SEA leur plus grande disponibilité et la possibilité d'accorder tout le temps voulu à chacun, étant entendu qu'ils assureront ce service bénévolement. Cette disponibilité devient primordiale pour La Porte ouverte qui, comme on l'a vu, doit se distinguer des services offerts par le SEA.

Le SEA fait valoir de son côté qu'il lui apparaît dangereux de remettre entre les mains d'un organisme temporaire un service jugé indispensable. Rien ne garantit, selon lui, que La Porte ouverte sera toujours là, à la fin du projet, pour assurer le service. À La Porte ouverte, on fait valoir, par ailleurs, l'argument de la survie: il se peut que La Porte ouverte ne soit plus là à la fin du projet pour assurer le service, mais le fait de ne pas lui permettre d'assurer ce service entraînerait presque à coup sûr sa disparition à la fin du projet. On n'a donc pas vraiment le choix: il faut miser résolument sur la survie.

La négociation dure deux mois et on s'entend finalement pour donner carte blanche à La Porte ouverte. Les résultats sont probants: le nombre d'inscriptions augmente sensiblement et, surtout, le taux d'abandons pendant la session diminue considérablement (du moins chez ceux qui sont inscrits par l'intermédiaire de La Porte ouverte). Seize personnes s'inscrivent au cours d'alphabétisation, dont 14 dans les niveaux les plus faibles. De ce nombre, 11 poursuivent leur formation jusqu'à la fin de la session.

Reste l'indispensable animation du milieu. Là, la situation est moins rose. Pour la première fois, La Porte ouverte se retrouve avec un seul animateur sur le terrain, pour un bassin de population d'environ 60 000 habitants. Le défi est grand: assurer une sensibilisation plus large du public, recruter plus de personnes analphabètes et offrir un nouveau service d'accueil. Somme toute, il faut faire *plus* avec *moins*.

Il n'est dès lors plus question de faire du porte à porte, de rendre visite à tous les groupes communautaires, d'arpenter tout le territoire à la recherche de lieux où parler d'alphabétisation. Faute de ressources humaines, et financières, La Porte ouverte doit choisir les cibles les plus faciles à atteindre.

C'est ainsi que l'animateur et le coordonnateur régional entreprennent de construire un réseau de contacts et de collaboration avec les organismes du milieu les plus susceptibles de rencontrer des personnes

analphabètes. Une vingtaine d'organismes publics et communautaires sont contactés. L'entente de collaboration prend la forme suivante:

> «On présente d'abord le groupe (historique) et les services (évaluation-motivation-inscription). Il est ensuite demandé aux intervenants de première ligne d'offrir les services du groupe à la personne concernée. Si elle se montre intéressée, on lui demande si elle est d'accord qu'on communique ses coordonnées (nom et numéro de téléphone) au groupe.
>
> «Dans le cas positif, l'organisme nous communique ses coordonnées. Nous entrons en contact avec la personne et lui proposons d'évaluer ses compétences en lecture et écriture. Nous prenons rendez-vous avec elle à domicile ou au local du groupe selon sa préférence.
>
> «Ce faisant, le groupe s'engage à deux choses:
>
> 1) assurer un service personnalisé à l'adulte;
>
> 2) assurer à l'organisme associé un suivi des démarches de l'individu[5].»

Les résultats s'avèrent très positifs quant à l'engagement du milieu. Une telle démarche responsabilise les individus et fait prendre conscience aux organismes de leur importance en tant qu'acteurs dans le milieu. En outre, la coordination régionale assurée par La Porte ouverte fait naître des échanges entre les animateurs de chacune des localités. Des consensus sur les moyens d'action et une certaine solidarité en résultent, qui conduisent, en fin d'année, à la formation d'un organe régional de représentation, le Groupe régional d'intervention alpha (GRIA).

1987: la régionalisation

En 1987, le GRIA, récemment formé, prend en charge la préalphabétisation sur l'ensemble du territoire. Le GRIA avait été formé à partir de la volonté d'unir les efforts des quatre comités alpha locaux et d'éliminer le problème du leadership, qui faisait paraître La Porte ouverte en position de force par rapport aux trois autres comités alpha et à la commission scolaire.

On obtient un nouveau projet de création d'emplois. Quatre personnes sont embauchées: trois animateurs-terrain et un coordonnateur

régional. On entrevoit déjà le problème: quatre points de service, la coordination à assurer, et... seulement quatre personnes sur le terrain.

Ayant jusqu'alors assuré le leadership régional, la Porte ouverte se voit attribuer la responsabilité de la coordination régionale. La question du leadership est donc loin d'être réglée. De leur côté, les trois comités alpha locaux en région réclament les services d'un animateur-terrain. On s'entend finalement pour doter chacun d'eux d'un animateur-terrain pour la durée du projet. La Porte ouverte, de son côté, devra se contenter d'un coordonnateur régional à plein temps, doublé d'un animateur à temps partiel.

Une seule personne hérite de la double tâche. Le travail sur le terrain est réduit à son minimum, alors que les objectifs demeurent les mêmes: sensibilisation et recrutement, sans oublier l'accueil et l'aide.

Sur le terrain, le milieu industriel, milieu fermé et recelant tant d'individus dans le besoin, devient une priorité, voire une obsession. Les remarques consignées au rapport de fin de projet sont éloquentes:

> «En cette ère de virage technologique, les besoins de formation de base des adultes se font de plus en plus pressants. L'entreprise de sensibilisation et d'information n'en devient que plus nécessaire [...].
>
> «À court terme, le milieu industriel devra constituer une cible privilégiée. Le contact avec celui-ci devra dépasser le simple accueil poli sans gestes ultérieurs concrets. Certaines industries sur le territoire comptent trop de travailleurs analphabètes pour continuer à feindre l'ignorance de la situation[4].»

Sur le plan de l'organisation, La Porte ouverte se retrouve en bien mauvaise posture: un seul employé, mi-rémunéré mi-bénévole, entouré d'une micro-équipe de trois bénévoles. C'est à l'animateur presque seul qu'incombe la lourde tâche de tenir «à bout de bras» La Porte ouverte. De l'avis des quelques membres restants, et à la lumière des dernières expériences, un virage radical s'impose.

Tout en élaborant une stratégie résolument urbaine et en tentant de garder le meilleur contact possible avec la commission scolaire, il faut envisager sérieusement d'offrir nous-mêmes une formation adaptée aux besoins qui ont été décelés au cours des dernières années, cela pour jouer un rôle actif dans la communauté et, en même temps, pour obtenir du financement à la seule source possible en dehors de la commission scolaire, la Direction générale de l'éducation des adultes (par l'intermédiaire du programme OVEP), qui n'aurait pas subventionné un organisme voué

exclusivement au recrutement de personnes analphabètes et à la promotion de l'alphabétisation.

En ce sens, l'année 1988 constituera un point tournant.

BILAN

De la non-reconnaissance du statut d'animateur-terrain

On l'a vu, le statut d'animateur-terrain est marqué au coin de la précarité. Si la sécurité d'emploi n'est pas l'apanage des formateurs, l'animateur-terrain se trouve, lui, tout au bas de l'échelle. Dès le départ, il sait que son action sera limitée dans le temps; tout au plus pourra-t-elle durer six mois, six mois où il devra parfaire sa connaissance du milieu, de son milieu de travail, des services à offrir, de la question générale de l'alphabétisation, pour finalement élaborer un plan d'action. Or six mois, c'est très court, surtout lorsqu'il faut songer à «l'après-projet».

En outre, le travail d'animateur-terrain, quoique primordial, demeure peu reconnu. «La préalphabétisation reste le parent pauvre dans la redistribution de l'argent et pourtant elle est la force motrice de la mission d'alphabétisation[10].» À La Porte ouverte, l'animateur étant devenu par la force des choses le moteur de l'organisme, c'est l'organisme tout entier qui doit assumer le statut précaire de l'animateur-terrain.

Chez nous, la préalphabétisation demeure la seule responsabilité du milieu, c'est-à-dire des groupes d'alphabétisation comme La Porte ouverte. Ces groupes (les comités alpha locaux) doivent donc se charger de la faire financer, de former les animateurs et d'encadrer leur travail de façon à obtenir les meilleurs résultats possibles (pour le SEA, en nombre d'inscriptions, il va sans dire). À Saint-Jean, le SEA recrutant surtout chez les jeunes «décrocheurs», la contribution de La Porte ouverte, malgré les efforts consentis, est perçue comme marginale (à peine 15 p. 100 des personnes qui sont en alphabétisation). C'est pourtant La Porte ouverte qui recrute la plus grande partie des analphabètes complets, mais ce travail exigeant est tenu pour acquis.

En fait, le travail de préalphabétisation, quoique primordial, est discret et demeure peu reconnu. Cette non-reconnaissance n'est pas le seul fait de la commission scolaire. Les organismes du milieu saisissent difficilement le rôle de La Porte ouverte en matière d'alphabétisation. On comprend aisément que des gens peu ou pas scolarisés puissent avoir besoin d'une formation de base, mais on s'explique mal qu'ils ne viennent pas d'eux-mêmes la chercher, là où on la donne. Au mieux considère-t-on La Porte ouverte comme un service de publicité de la commission scolaire. La non-reconnaissance s'étend jusqu'aux bénéficiaires du service qui, même

convaincus de l'efficacité de La Porte ouverte, n'en éprouvent pas moins des difficultés à la dissocier de la commission scolaire.

Pour La Porte ouverte, la discontinuité de l'action bloque toute forme de reconnaissance, mais aussi tout espoir de développement. Du confinement exclusif à la préalphabétisation résulte une méconnaissance de l'action globale. La vente du « produit alpha » n'en devient que plus difficile. L'alphabétisation s'inscrivant dans une démarche globale d'accès à l'autonomie, il est difficile d'y intervenir efficacement si l'un des aspects de la démarche est isolé. On s'est spécialisé dans un secteur, mais on demeure novice dans les autres.

Difficultés de financement de la préalphabétisation

La non-reconnaissance de la préalphabétisation entraîne aussi nécessairement une difficulté à la faire financer de façon autonome. Le ministère de l'Éducation a des réticences à reconnaître et à financer un organisme dit autonome dont le service de sensibilisation-recrutement semble profiter directement à un organisme déjà financé par l'État.

La préalphabétisation, quand elle est financée, ne l'est qu'indirectement. Les programmes fédéraux de création d'emplois, qui financent le développement de l'employabilité de chômeurs de longue date et non les activités du groupe, en sont une excellente illustration. La Porte ouverte a eu plus que sa part des subventions des programmes fédéraux (huit en six ans). On sentait bien ces dernières années que la source allait bientôt se tarir. L'accueil du député fédéral était de plus en plus éloquent. On nous faisait comprendre que La Porte ouverte avait déjà été largement financée, toujours pour le même type d'activités, et que d'autres organismes, généralement plus novateurs, attendaient un premier financement.

Nos conclusions

En 1988, après cinq années de travail de préalphabétisation, l'heure est au bilan. Pas moins de 11 personnes sont passées au poste d'animateur-terrain. De ce nombre, une est toujours — temporairement? — sur le terrain. Le conseil d'administration est essoufflé et démobilisé. La Porte ouverte attend toujours un autre projet de création d'emplois et, cette fois-ci, la partie est loin d'être gagnée. Beaucoup d'efforts ont été investis dans le GRIA pour peu de résultats. Nos services demeurent peu connus et peu appréciés. Les perspectives de développement paraissent à peu près nulles. Les quatre personnes qui restent au conseil d'administration, lasses de devoir régulièrement sortir de l'agonie un organisme dans lequel chacune a déjà largement investi, doivent faire le point.

On a constaté, par exemple, au contact des apprenants, que le service offert par le SEA ne répond pas à tous les besoins. Certains besoins

pratiques (comme faire une liste d'épicerie, établir un budget, lire des consignes au travail, etc.) ne sont pas comblés. De plus, le fait que la formation se donne à l'école polyvalente en rebute plus d'un, particulièrement parmi les jeunes décrocheurs.

Pour La Porte ouverte, il apparaît alors primordial d'assumer l'alphabétisation dans sa totalité. Il importe fondamentalement de ne pas laisser sans service des gens dans le besoin, et d'agir le plus adéquatement possible, tout au long de l'action.

Cette nouvelle orientation comporte trois grands objectifs:

— Assurer le suivi tout au long de sa démarche d'apprentissage;

— Mettre au point une pratique d'alphabétisation de type populaire;

— Faire reconnaître et financer notre action (et du même coup le volet « préalphabétisation »).

L'objectif terminal de cette démarche consiste à développer l'autonomie du groupe et à le faire reconnaître. Cette préoccupation était déjà présente dans l'esprit des animateurs-terrain en 1985: « Étant donné la situation, nous pensons que la suite à donner au projet de sensibilisation serait de se concentrer sur la consolidation d'un groupe autonome qui assure le leadership d'une intervention globale en alpha[9]. »

La nouvelle orientation n'est pas sans créer des ondes de choc au sein du SEA et des autres comités alpha qui sont membres du GRIA. Chez le premier, on redoute un dédoublement des services, tandis que chez les seconds, on parle de jeux de coulisse et de changement de vocation. Aujourd'hui, un an plus tard, les esprits se sont calmés et les réticences du départ ont fait place, dans une certaine mesure, à la compréhension et la confiance.

Cet important virage amorcé, les chances de développement paraissent beaucoup plus nombreuses, les possibilités de financement aussi. Les activités privilégiées demeurent les mêmes: l'action dans les industries, la recherche, la préparation de matériel didactique et la mise sur pied d'un centre de documentation, projet maintenant réalisé. En somme, toutes des activités finançables par le moyen des programmes fédéraux de création d'emplois, certes, mais aussi par d'autres ministères et organismes à vocation sociale et économique.

Se donner de nouveaux objectifs est une chose, les mener à terme en est une autre. Il faut aussi se donner les moyens de mener la barque à bon port. Le projet de développement de l'emploi de 1988 jouera, en ce sens, un rôle déterminant.

DE L'ACTION PARTIELLE À L'ACTION GLOBALE

Deux animatrices se succèdent sur le terrain. Il est clairement établi, dès le départ, que leur travail dans le comité est aussi important que leur travail dans le milieu, comme ce fut le cas en 1986. Le mandat très large qui leur est confié consiste à rendre l'organisme autonome, à le faire connaître comme tel dans la communauté, ainsi qu'à poursuivre la sensibilisation-recrutement et l'accueil et l'aide.

La première animatrice, qui possède une solide expérience en tant que formatrice, s'engage à créer des outils pédagogiques. Elle prépare une grille d'analyse des besoins pratiques et une banque de matériel didactique pour les ateliers pratiques. Elle doit malheureusement quitter son poste au milieu du projet. Le travail entrepris reste inachevé.

L'animatrice qui prend la relève a plus d'expérience en relations publiques. L'organisme entreprend donc d'utiliser ses compétences particulières. Elle établit rapidement son plan d'action:

« 1. Rendre l'organisme autonome:
   — par un conseil d'administration représentatif du milieu;
   — par des moyens de financement plus adéquats.
2. Doter l'organisme d'une expertise reconnue en alphabétisation.
3. Faire des démarches de financement.
4. Intervenir en milieu industriel[11]. »

Le conseil d'administration

Pour établir la crédibilité de l'organisme, l'animatrice entreprend de recruter au conseil d'administration (CA) des gens en vue dans la communauté. Six nouveaux membres sont ainsi introduits au CA. On compte parmi eux deux enseignants à la retraite, un conseiller pédagogique, un professeur menant une recherche en andragogie, une responsable d'un groupe de parents d'enfants en difficultés d'apprentissage et un libraire. Les membres du précédent CA — l'équipe de salariés de La Porte ouverte de même qu'un ex-apprenant — restent en poste pour assurer la transition. Un peu plus tard, d'un commun accord et pour vraiment assurer une participation des représentants de la communauté, il est convenu que les membres de la Porte ouverte se retirent du CA. On se rend alors rapidement compte qu'il est difficile et exigeant, tant pour le CA que pour les animateurs, de fonctionner de cette façon. Le CA ayant pour rôle d'administrer la corporation et de décider de ses orientations, il lui faut être constamment alimenté par la base. Pour les animateurs, déjà surchargés par

la tâche, une telle entreprise se révèle rapidement essoufflante. De son côté, le CA a parfois l'impression, lorsqu'on lui présente les dossiers, que les décisions sont déjà prises.

Cette situation crée rapidement des tensions: le CA se sent inutile et l'équipe de La Porte ouverte remet de plus en plus sérieusement son rôle en question. Les membres du CA démissionnent bientôt de leurs fonctions, remettant ainsi La Porte ouverte dans les mains de son équipe de salariés.

Un organisme qui est entièrement dirigé par ses animateurs depuis des années accepte mal un virage aussi radical dans ses mécanismes de prise de décision. Un CA composé de membres de la communauté s'avère néanmoins souhaitable. Il permet à l'organisme de mieux pénétrer le milieu et à la communauté de mieux comprendre toute la question de l'analphabétisme et de l'alphabétisation populaire. Mais une telle entreprise d'interpénétration requiert une bonne préparation et un suivi régulier des dossiers. En ce sens, la présence d'animateurs au sein du CA, plus que souhaitable, est inévitable.

De nouveaux services

L'idée d'agir dans l'ensemble de la démarche d'alphabétisation était présente depuis un certain temps: il ne restait plus qu'à la mettre en pratique. À l'approche de l'Année internationale de l'alphabétisation (1990), saisissant l'occasion de la levée du moratoire sur le programme d'aide aux organismes volontaires d'éducation populaire (OVEP) et pour mieux répondre aux besoins exprimés, nous décidons, en septembre 1988, que le moment est venu de se lancer de plain-pied dans le champ de la formation.

L'animatrice se charge de publiciser les nouveaux services et La Porte ouverte et tient une journée de sensibilisation régionale visant à faire part de ses nouvelles orientations aux groupes communautaires.

L'accueil de la communauté est plus qu'enthousiaste. Chacun reconnaît d'emblée le bien-fondé de notre démarche et la nécessité d'un type d'action nouveau. Chacun reconnaît aussi qu'il a une part de responsabilité dans la lutte contre l'analphabétisme et se dit prêt à appuyer notre action. L'idée, si chère aux animateurs, d'associer la communauté dans la lutte contre l'analphabétisme commence enfin à se concrétiser.

Forts de cet appui, les animateurs entreprennent avec enthousiasme les premiers ateliers d'alphabétisation. On recrute les formateurs, d'abord à l'intérieur de l'organisme. Les auteurs de ces lignes, déjà en place, s'entourent de deux formatrices bénévoles. Ces formatrices sont choisies pour leur engagement en faveur de l'alphabétisation et non pour l'importance

de leur curriculum vitae ou de leurs diplômes. Des gens ordinaires pour alphabétiser des gens ordinaires, voilà le critère de sélection.

Deux groupes d'apprenants sont formés. Le premier, issu du monde du travail, est composé de travailleuses de l'industrie du textile. Leurs besoins sont très pratiques: faire un budget, rédiger un curriculum vitae, connaître les ressources en orientation scolaire et professionnelle, etc. Cet atelier dit de «formation sociale» a trois objectifs: faire prendre conscience aux participantes de leurs acquis; favoriser une prise de conscience individuelle et collective de leur situation; développer leur autonomie individuelle et leur détermination en tant que groupe social. Les discussions sur les expériences de vie visent toujours l'apprentissage de l'écrit par les participantes. Des exposés de personnes-ressources, ainsi que certains exercices de français écrit font partie des ateliers.

Le second groupe se compose d'apprenants qui suivent déjà un cours d'alphabétisation au SEA. L'atelier, dit «fonctionnel», vise à leur faire assimiler la matière vue en classe. Pour les formateurs de cet atelier, il importe de présenter d'une façon nouvelle les contenus dispensés par la formatrice du SEA. Ce travail nécessite, on le devinera, une bonne dose de créativité, certains, plus lents, devant essayer plusieurs approches avant d'assimiler les connaissances. Cet atelier a six objectifs: faire participer chacun à sa propre démarche d'apprentissage; le sécuriser par rapport à celle-ci; entretenir la motivation; démythifier les difficultés du français; favoriser l'entraide; faire prendre conscience des acquis cognitifs et expérientiels.

La participation

Mais plus que tout, les ateliers de La Porte ouverte permettent de développer une nouvelle attitude chez les participants, qui passent rapidement du rôle de simples apprenants à celui de partenaires dans l'organisme.

La participation est d'abord favorisée dans les ateliers. Les participants influencent ainsi grandement la conduite des activités de formation: le contenu des ateliers est décidé par eux, suivant les besoins exprimés; quant aux horaires et à la durée de la formation, ils en décident en accord avec les formateurs. C'est ainsi qu'à leur demande, l'atelier de jour passe, au cours de l'année, d'une seule période à deux par semaine.

Les participants sentent qu'ils ont un véritable pouvoir de décision sur leurs apprentissages, individuellement et collectivement. Ils n'ont plus à suivre une formation définie à l'avance et à laquelle ils doivent s'adapter.

Cette nouvelle dynamique de participation déborde bientôt largement le cadre des ateliers. Certains participants désirent participer plus activement à l'ensemble des activités; l'un d'entre eux siège présentement au CA.

Constats actuels

Il nous paraît maintenant beaucoup plus facile de promouvoir l'alphabétisation dans la communauté. On sait de quoi on parle. Conséquemment, La Porte ouverte est une ressource communautaire de plus en plus reconnue. On n'hésite plus à lui adresser des gens que l'on voyait mal à l'éducation des adultes. Une nouvelle solidarité de même qu'un nouveau partenariat émergent du milieu.

L'action dans le domaine de la formation aura permis à l'organisme d'acquérir un nouveau savoir-faire. La Porte ouverte a pu créer de nouveaux outils pédagogiques, de même qu'une approche qui lui est propre. En nous inspirant du proverbe qui dit que «c'est en forgeant qu'on devient forgeron», nous disons que ce n'est qu'en alphabétisant qu'on peut devenir alphabétiseur. Se contenter d'un seul aspect du métier, c'est comme allumer la flamme et manier le soufflet, en laissant à d'autres le soin de façonner le métal.

Mais, par-dessus tout, ce que la prise en charge de la globalité de l'action d'alphabétisation aura apporté, c'est la reconnaissance tant souhaitée par tous les animateurs qui sont passés à La Porte ouverte. Leur travail acharné est enfin reconnu à sa juste valeur. Les animateurs ne sont plus «de passage»; ils se sentent véritablement partie prenante à une cause qui leur tient à cœur.

Aujourd'hui, de plus en plus d'individus et de groupes bénévoles sensibles à la question de l'alphabétisation viennent mettre l'épaule à la roue. La «famille alpha» s'élargit de jour en jour. Un nouveau conseil d'administration, composé d'animateurs, d'apprenants et de membres de la communauté très au fait de la question de l'alphabétisation accomplit un travail formidable d'encadrement et de représentation dans le milieu. Les résultats de ce travail sont tangibles. Deux clubs sociaux se sont associés pour payer un loyer pour les deux prochaines années. Les communautés religieuses se sont engagées à assurer une permanence à La Porte ouverte pour au moins les trois prochaines années. Les dons en matériel ont permis de meubler et d'organiser les lieux de façon fonctionnelle. Une chronique hebdomadaire dans le journal local permet de joindre un plus large public.

La Porte ouverte tient maintenant 4 ateliers par semaine, pour 35 personnes. La demande étant très forte, des négociations pour le financement d'heures de formation ont été engagées avec la commission scolaire. L'organisme dispose, depuis l'été de 1989, d'un centre de documentation entièrement informatisé comptant pas moins de 500 titres.

Aujourd'hui, La Porte ouverte participe activement au Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec et à la Table

régionale des organismes volontaires d'éducation populaire de la Montérégie. Ces liens nouveaux stimulent l'échange et le ressourcement de nos animateurs tout en renforçant notre cause commune: la reconnaissance de l'éducation populaire autonome. L'analphabétisme étant un fait social, nous croyons que ce n'est que collectivement que nous pourrons vraiment l'affronter.

PERSPECTIVES D'AVENIR

L'avenir nous dira si nous avons fait les bons choix. Le virage qui a été pris était l'aboutissement logique d'une démarche et d'une réflexion entreprises depuis des années.

Qu'on se rappelle les grands moments de cette démarche. D'abord la sensibilisation-recrutement, qui nous a fait nous interroger sur la manière de joindre les personnes analphabètes et qui nous a amené à vouloir travailler plus directement auprès de la population. Puis, la création du service d'accueil et d'aide, ce service qui nous a permis de mieux cerner les besoins des personnes analphabètes et donc de mieux évaluer l'utilité des services offerts. Et finalement, les constatations faites sur ces pratiques, qui ont mis en évidence la nécessité d'offrir une formation différente de celle qui est offerte à l'éducation des adultes.

La Porte ouverte sera donc passée du statut d'appendice de la commission scolaire à celui de ressource complémentaire, puis à celui de ressource «alternative». Les perspectives actuelles s'inscrivent dans le prolongement de cette démarche.

En ce qui a trait à la sensibilisation, le milieu industriel demeure une cible prioritaire. La tâche a été entreprise, mais il reste beaucoup à faire pour percer ce milieu plutôt fermé à l'alphabétisation.

Le développement des services reste aussi un souci constant. Il faut consolider nos acquis en préalphabétisation et développer la postalphabétisation, en y associant le plus possible les apprenants.

Le perfectionnement des formateurs constitue aussi une de nos priorités. Notre participation au programme de formation du Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec permet aux formateurs de se familiariser avec les différentes pratiques de l'action en alphabétisation.

L'engagement de tous les secteurs de la communauté dans la lutte contre l'analphabétisme demeure notre objectif. Nous croyons plus que jamais que l'analphabétisme est un problème social, qui dépasse largement la seule dimension éducative. C'est pourquoi nous entendons continuer à travailler pour que le problème soit pris en charge par la collectivité.

Le chemin parcouru par La Porte ouverte depuis sa fondation aura été semé de difficultés, qui l'ont amenée parfois au bord de la disparition. Ce n'est qu'à force d'efforts, individuels surtout mais aussi collectifs, qu'on peut toujours parler aujourd'hui d'une Porte ouverte à Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu.

De sous-traitant bénévole à statut précaire travaillant dans l'ombre, La Porte ouverte est devenue aujourd'hui un partenaire à part entière dans le milieu. Son objectif principal d'associer la communauté à la lutte contre l'analphabétisme demeure un souci constant, et La Porte ouverte se croit mieux outillée que jamais auparavant pour le mener à terme.

Nous souhaitons que la petite histoire de La Porte ouverte ait sensibilisé le lecteur à la place qui est faite dans notre société à l'action populaire en alphabétisation. Nous souhaitons aussi, modestement, qu'elle puisse inspirer une nouvelle génération d'animateurs en alphabétisation qui sauront éviter les écueils auxquels nous nous sommes heurtés.

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FEMMES ET ALPHABÉTISATION: UN MOUVEMENT QUI S'IMPOSE

Élise De Coster
La Jarnigoine
Montréal, Québec

AU FIL DES RÉALITÉS

L'alphabétisation populaire est un ensemble de pratiques et d'actions s'adressant à des groupes sociaux défavorisés, qui vise essentiellement le développement de l'autonomie des individus. Les groupes populaires d'alphabétisation ont la volonté de s'ancrer dans la réalité sociale des milieux où ils travaillent afin d'agir conformément aux besoins, aux valeurs et à l'intérêt des personnes analphabètes. Pour eux l'alphabétisation est non seulement l'apprentissage de la lecture, de l'écriture et du calcul, mais aussi une démarche de réflexion et d'expression individuelle et collective.

Apprendre à lire et à écrire n'est qu'un des aspects de la lutte pour l'autonomie. Si l'on veut agir efficacement, il faut tenir compte des facteurs qui conditionnent ou déterminent la réalité des personnes analphabètes afin de pouvoir s'attaquer à la source des problèmes sociaux qui entretiennent et reproduisent l'analphabétisme. Dans cette optique, agir, c'est faire des gestes politiques dans le but d'activer une prise de conscience, de susciter une volonté de changement et d'adapter l'alphabétisation aux réalités sociales.

Au cours de leur pratique, des animatrices en alphabétisation ont constaté certains faits[1] qui les ont amenées à s'interroger sur une réalité mal connue: l'analphabétisme chez les femmes.

Les femmes fréquentent en grand nombre les groupes populaires, lieux traditionnellement réservés aux personnes les plus démunies. Leur moyenne d'âge est généralement élevée. Leur accès aux ressources d'alphabétisation semble limité par des facteurs relatifs à leur rôle dans la famille. Très motivées, elles sont cependant peu encouragées par leur entourage, et les motifs d'absence et d'abandon sont souvent liés aux pressions familiales.

Dans les ateliers, elles s'expriment peu et parlent rarement de leurs préoccupations. Si les femmes analphabètes arrivent à se débrouiller dans des situations qui leur sont familières, elles sont toutefois démunies, voire même complètement dépourvues face à l'imprévu. Humiliées et infériorisées, elles sont peu portées à communiquer.

Les femmes veulent d'abord et avant tout un lieu exempt de toute forme de comportements engendrés par les rapports de domination et de subordination qui, pour la plupart, ont marqué leur vie depuis l'enfance. Les attitudes sexistes aboutissent à la soumission et réduisent au silence. Ce type de rapports demeure très courant dans les groupes mixtes. Les femmes se sentent piégées et ramenées à ce qu'elles ne veulent plus vivre. Elles souhaitent désormais se concentrer et travailler dans un contexte propice à l'apprentissage.

Actuellement, l'idée de concevoir et de mettre sur pied des ateliers réservés aux femmes est très peu répandue au Québec dans le milieu de l'alphabétisation, tant dans les établissements d'enseignement que dans les groupes populaires. Le manque de ressources et la non-reconnaissance des problèmes des femmes en sont les deux principales raisons. Pourtant, dans les groupes où certaines activités s'adressent aux femmes seulement, les animatrices ont vite remarqué un changement : les participantes arrivent à se tailler une place, à habiter progressivement le lieu et à créer un climat favorable à leur expression. Elles parlent d'elles, des différents aspects de leur vie plus facilement. Elles manifestent rapidement la volonté de se rassembler afin de définir les conditions qu'elles jugent indispensables pour apprendre ainsi que d'expérimenter des outils pédagogiques conformes à leurs attentes.

Pour bien comprendre la nécessité d'instaurer des groupes non mixtes dans les centres d'éducation populaire, il faut considérer l'apprentissage dans un sens large. Le fonctionnement cognitif, l'acquisition des notions et des habiletés essentielles à la maîtrise de la lecture, de l'écriture et du calcul ne sont qu'une des facettes de la démarche, puisque l'analphabétisme se présente souvent comme un problème d'expression global. L'acte d'apprendre, c'est-à-dire de recevoir et de transmettre de l'information, de modifier ses connaissances et d'y greffer des éléments nouveaux, est intimement lié à la capacité de communiquer avec les autres. Dans le contexte de l'éducation des adultes, on doit tenir compte de cela et le mettre en relation avec les motivations des individus, leur expérience antérieure et leurs attitudes à l'égard de l'apprentissage. Les ateliers réservés aux femmes offrent donc de nouveaux avantages.

L'isolement et le manque d'information limitent l'accès des femmes analphabètes aux ressources du milieu qui pourraient leur fournir les moyens de changer leur réalité. Par ailleurs, les animatrices qui travaillent dans des secteurs autres que l'alphabétisation éprouvent de la difficulté à aborder la question ; elles ne peuvent reconnaître les différentes formes de l'analphabétisme, déceler les problèmes qu'il engendre et déterminer quelles sont les ressources en alphabétisation auxquelles adresser les analphabètes.

On trouve très peu de documentation sur les femmes analphabètes. Les statistiques, rares et souvent contradictoires, portent généralement sur le degré de scolarité ou sur le phénomène général de l'analphabétisme. Son caractère particulier chez les femmes n'est jamais posé comme un fait à partir duquel travailler. Une fois de plus, le vécu des femmes semble inconnu et absent de l'histoire.

Afin de remédier à la situation, des animatrices ont tenté, par des recherches-actions et divers projets, de tracer un profil plus précis des femmes analphabètes qui fréquentent leurs centres afin de les aider plus efficacement dans leur appropriation d'elles-mêmes et du monde qui les entoure.

EN FOUILLANT L'ANECDOTE, ON ÉLABORE LA THÉORIE

Les femmes vivent une oppression propre qui engendre des conditions de vie particulières.

Poussées par le désir et la volonté d'engager les femmes du Centre comme sujets «actifs et moteurs» de leur recherche-action[2], les animatrices du Centre de lecture et d'écriture (CLÉ) ont choisi la formule du récit de vie afin de mieux cerner la réalité des femmes analphabètes.

Des entrevues avec huit participantes, un échange sur les expériences de vie, une communication riche d'émotion. Douze heures d'enregistrement consignées en quelque 200 pages: un ensemble de témoignages que l'on décortique et organise par thèmes afin de protéger l'anonymat des participantes et de faire une synthèse qui va au-delà de l'aspect personnel. En fouillant l'anecdote, on élabore la théorie.

Parallèlement, des animatrices[3] du centre d'alphabétisation La Jarnigoine ont entrepris une étude menée conjointement avec des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes victimes de violence et des centres de jour de l'île de Montréal. Elles organisent des rencontres d'information portant sur l'analphabétisme chez les femmes. Animatrices des maisons, résidentes d'hébergement, participantes aux centres de jour, immigrantes ayant collaboré à des campagnes d'alphabétisation dans leur pays d'origine et animatrices en alphabétisation, environ 150 femmes participent à des discussions sur l'analphabétisme chez les femmes.

Même si elles se succèdent, ces deux recherches-actions ont été menées de façon complètement indépendante. Sans se consulter, on aborde les mêmes thèmes, on fait des observations similaires et on tire des conclusions qui confirment qu'on doit reconnaître qu'il y a un problème particulier et faire valoir la nécessité d'offrir aux femmes des ressources adéquates, comme on le fait présentement pour d'autres groupes, tels les jeunes, les immigrants et les ex-détenus.

Certes il existe des facteurs communs aux femmes et aux hommes: pour tous l'analphabétisme résulte de différentes formes d'oppression engendrées par des rapports sociaux qui excluent et marginalisent. Pour tous il est lié à la pauvreté, il réduit au silence. Les personnes analphabètes sont exploitées, bâillonnées par la peur et la honte. Mais il existe des différences: selon les contextes sociaux, l'analphabétisme se manifeste et se vit différemment.

Une vision commune

Les deux recherches-actions avaient comme objectif de cerner les caractéristiques des femmes analphabètes qui fréquentent les groupes populaires en établissant des relations entre l'analphabétisme et l'éducation traditionnelle des femmes, les apprentissages sexistes, la division sexuelle du travail, l'accès à l'emploi et, plus globalement, le rôle traditionnel des femmes dans la société.

L'isolement et la discrimination, qui marquent la socialisation des femmes, jouent un rôle déterminant dans les manifestations de l'analphabétisme et dans la façon dont la situation est vécue. En effet, parmi les causes d'analphabétisme chez les femmes, plusieurs sont en rapport direct avec les attitudes et les comportements discriminatoires que ces femmes ont eu à subir. L'histoire des femmes analphabètes, à l'image de celle des femmes, est morcelée, douloureuse et marquée dès l'enfance par la discrimination. Issues généralement de familles nombreuses où la mère s'occupe des enfants et de la maison, les filles reçoivent une éducation centrée sur leur rôle au sein de la famille. Elles quittent l'école s'il y a un parent malade ou si la mère ne peut suffire à la tâche; elles abandonnent leurs études pour prendre en charge les responsabilités familiales. La vieille mentalité persiste: on encourage les études des garçons, on freine celles des filles. À l'école, les absences longues et répétées des filles entraînent souvent un jugement sévère quant à leur capacité d'apprendre. Enfin, découragées ou forcées par les pressions familiales, elles quittent l'école très tôt.

Les femmes ont une place sociale bien déterminée et s'identifient rapidement au rôle qu'on leur impose. Les rapports familiaux et, par extension, sociaux influencent et délimitent peu à peu leur environnement. La plupart de leurs activités convergent vers des tâches précises et répétitives. Bien qu'elles y développent de nombreuses habiletés, leur espace n'en demeure pas moins très réduit: elles travaillent seules et ont peu de moyens pour agir. Plusieurs d'entre elles vivent ou ont vécu en état de dépendance par rapport à leur conjoint, ce qui limite encore davantage leur autonomie.

La majorité d'entre elles ont voulu, à un moment ou à un autre de leur vie, avoir un travail socialement reconnu, intéressant, stable et rémunéré. Mais le taux de chômage est élevé et les emplois rares. Dans les secteurs

où elles postulent, les critères d'embauche sont souvent sans rapport avec les tâches à accomplir : ils sont arbitraires, injustes et généralement fondés sur la discrimination en fonction de la race, de l'âge, du sexe et de l'aspect physique.

D'après des statistiques établies par des groupes de femmes travaillant sur le domaine de l'emploi, celles qui prennent part aux séances d'information sur la conjoncture du marché du travail et les possibilités d'embauche ont entre 30 et 50 ans et sont, en général, assistées sociales, chômeuses ou employées temporaires et à temps partiel. Pour 25 à 30 p. 100 d'entre elles, c'est un retour après un arrêt prolongé dû aux obligations familiales. Elles ont recours à ces services après des refus successifs, des échecs subis dans leurs démarches ou parce que le stress et le manque de confiance en elles les empêchent de se présenter aux tests écrits.

Ces femmes sont peu portées à faire valoir leur expérience, d'ailleurs rarement reconnue. Parce qu'elles sont sous-scolarisées, elles se retrouvent dans les ghettos féminins du travail, elles sont concentrées dans des emplois non syndiqués, caractérisés par la cadence rapide, l'absence d'avantages sociaux et l'instabilité. Plusieurs cumulent deux emplois, en demeurant sous-payées ; d'autres travaillent carrément au noir. Les nombreux obstacles liés à l'analphabétisme et l'insécurité découlant de la non-reconnaissance de leurs acquis les empêchent d'accéder à des emplois mieux rémunérés ou d'exiger de meilleures conditions de travail.

Discrimination, isolement, rôle social non reconnu, tâches répétitives, espace restreint et dépendance économique caractérisent les conditions de vie des femmes, aggravent leur situation d'analphabètes et contribuent à créer un profil particulier. Conditionnées très jeunes à occuper une place en périphérie des divers champs culturels et sociaux, elles sont peu appelées à utiliser les canaux ordinaires de la communication et, conséquemment, à parfaire leur connaissance du code écrit.

Un itinéraire à travers des idées et des projets

Des projets spéciaux ont été mis sur pied afin de susciter une prise de conscience et de provoquer un changement. Bien que conçus de façon indépendante, ils ont un même objectif : combattre l'analphabétisme en améliorant les conditions de vie des femmes analphabètes. Reposant sur la volonté et la détermination de certaines animatrices en alphabétisation, ils demeurent toutefois marginaux. Le manque de temps et de ressources financières empêchent présentement la mise en commun des expériences, qui pourrait déboucher sur des actions concertées s'inscrivant dans une stratégie globale d'action.

À **CLÉ**, on a créé, par l'intermédiaire d'un *Comité femmes*, une activité supplémentaire, parallèle aux ateliers d'alphabétisation.

Au centre **Atout-lire**[4] et à **La Jarnigoine**, on a mis sur pied un atelier pratique conçu pour les femmes.

À **La Jarnigoine**, on a produit des outils d'action en alphabétisation, adaptés aux besoins des animatrices des maisons d'hébergement et des centres de jour de l'île de Montréal.

À **La Gigogne**[5], on a ajouté des ateliers d'alphabétisation aux activités habituelles d'accueil et d'hébergement des femmes et des enfants victimes de violence.

S'éduquer pour comprendre comment changer sa situation, sa condition de femme[6]

La recherche-action de CLÉ avait pour objectif de créer un lieu d'échange et de réflexion. La volonté des femmes du Centre, participantes et animatrices, de se regrouper et de partager leurs idées était déterminante. Il a été décidé de mettre sur pied une démarche féministe en alphabétisation en créant un Comité femmes. Essais, temps forts et périodes d'incertitude ont marqué les trois ans d'existence de cette expérience collective.

Le désir d'instaurer un climat de confiance et de resserrer les liens qui les unissent aux autres femmes, en tant que ménagères, épouses, mères ou travailleuses, motive les participantes à s'organiser. Ensemble elles définissent les objectifs du Comité: créer un lieu d'échange et de réflexion, de prise de parole, de soutien et de solidarité, d'organisation et d'action pour changer leur condition de femmes analphabètes.

Conçues sous forme de rencontres exploratoires, les premières activités du Comité servent à mieux cerner les objectifs et à aborder les questions liées au vécu des participantes. Les discussions entraînent inévitablement une réflexion sur les femmes analphabètes et, par extension, sur les femmes dans la société. Les réunions portent sur des thèmes choisis par le groupe: le 8 mars, la répartition des tâches au Centre, la ménopause, les relations interpersonnelles, les peurs, les inquiétudes. Générateurs de complicité et d'idées nouvelles, ces échanges de points de vue, d'information et d'expériences, tant heureuses que douloureuses, sont toujours très stimulants. L'intérêt des femmes est manifeste. Le Comité regroupe jusqu'à 18 participantes.

On reconnaît les réalités des femmes analphabètes au même titre que celles des femmes vivant des situations sociales mieux connues. On parle de ses forces, ses faiblesses, ses désirs et ses folies dans un monde dominé par les hommes. La somme des expériences vécues est impressionnante, mais difficile à analyser. On a du mal à cerner les réalités, à trouver un fil conducteur et à tirer une connaissance nouvelle.

Devant le sentiment d'impuissance ressenti par le Comité, on fait un bilan de la situation et on conclut qu'on a sauté certaines étapes nécessaires à l'élaboration d'une démarche féministe. Neuf femmes, animatrices et participantes, se penchent alors sur le déroulement des rencontres afin de redéfinir le fonctionnement du Comité. On cherche à organiser des rencontres plus fructueuses en intégrant les thèmes à une démarche planifiée. Par exemple, à partir de «sexisme, harcèlement et peur», on s'attache à cerner la réalité du sexisme et du harcèlement dans la vie quotidienne. Chacune s'exprime: en racontant ses expériences et celles dont elle a été témoin. On prend graduellement conscience des faits et de leurs conséquences. On explore sentiments et réactions devant ces faits. Ensemble on appréhende la réalité, on la nomme, on l'explique à sa façon, constituant ainsi un savoir nouveau. L'analyse se développe, peu à peu on souligne les aspects théoriques de la question à partir de son propre point de vue. On illustre ensuite le propos plus concrètement par la mise en scène de différentes situations impliquant idées et émotions. On explore, à travers les faits, les moyens à prendre pour agir; on trouve une façon de rendre les réalités visibles et de les transformer.

Une nouvelle étape est franchie: on parle de changement, on cherche comment le provoquer, l'organiser, le rendre possible. On s'engage de plus en plus: l'individuel et le privé deviennent collectifs et politiques. On s'organise ensemble en fonction des objectifs à atteindre et on choisit d'agir au Centre même. On met sur pied un atelier d'écriture collective: les femmes s'adressent aux hommes qu'elles côtoient. Le texte est publié dans le journal et dans l'agenda réalisé par tous les participants du Centre; il circule, provoque des réactions et soulève des discussions.

L'activité représente, en théorie et en pratique, un modèle de démarche féministe en alphabétisation. Elle permet aux femmes de prendre conscience de leur situation, d'acquérir une connaissance théorique de leur expérience et d'exercer un pouvoir réel dans leur vie en effectuant un changement touchant à la fois condition féminine et alphabétisation. Elle s'inscrit dans une pratique d'alphabétisation qui tient compte du vécu, de la socialisation et des attitudes des femmes analphabètes.

À partir de l'idéologie féministe selon laquelle «le privé est politique», le Comité de CLÉ favorise tout au long de sa démarche l'approche «groupe de conscience», pierre angulaire du mouvement des femmes. Au lieu d'intégrer les problèmes et de développer un sentiment de culpabilité, les femmes apprennent à partager leurs expériences, à dépasser la responsabilité individuelle et à saisir la portée collective de leurs problèmes. Pour les femmes engagées, on souligne ainsi le caractère commun des expériences et on les situe dans une société où l'oppression des femmes est généralisée et institutionnalisée. En établissant le lien entre le privé et le politique, les femmes de CLÉ peuvent mieux nommer leur réalité, prendre conscience de leur situation et réaliser un changement en améliorant la qualité de leur rapport avec les participants du Centre.

LA VOIE DES FEMMES[7]

Nous avons décidé d'écrire ce texte dans le but de sensibiliser les hommes à des situations qu'on vit régulièrement avec eux et avec lesquelles on se sent pas à l'aise. Par exemple, au Centre, souvent on se fait faire des remarques désobligeantes sur notre personne: « T'as bien engraissé, t'es bien niaiseuse, t'as toujours la même peignure », et ça va jusqu'à des regards qui nous déshabillent. Y a aussi les farces plates sur nous les femmes. Au Centre comme à la maison, il faut souvent répéter les mêmes affaires: « Messieurs, ramassez votre vaisselle, lavez vos tasses, aidez-nous à ramasser ce qui traîne... » C'est donc fatigant de toujours répéter les mêmes choses et de se sentir responsables du ménage et de la décoration du Centre. C'est vrai qu'on a appris, jeunes, à faire les tâches domestiques. « Chez nous, on était neuf et c'est les filles qui faisaient le ménage. » On a compris vite ce que ça voulait dire de tenir maison, et on aurait bien aimé ça que les gars l'apprennent aussi. Et c'est pas juste pour le ménage qu'on a été élevées différemment. C'est pour ça qu'on pense pas pareil. On a appris à se défendre, on a pas appris à s'affirmer et à prendre notre place dans la société. On nous a appris à ne pas répondre parce que ce n'était pas poli pour une petite fille. Et même aujourd'hui on a de la misère à répondre quand y nous arrive des situations désagréables comme se faire coller, se faire bécoter, minoucher quand ça nous tente pas.

Nous autres on pense qu'il est important de répondre parce qu'on n'aime pas ça se faire niaiser. On s'est dit qu'il y avait des façons de répondre. C'est pas en étant bête qu'on va se faire comprendre. Quelquefois c'est par l'humour qu'on s'en sort le mieux. À d'autres moments, on décide d'être sourdes aux remarques désobligeantes. Des fois ils ne se rendent pas compte que ça nous blesse, il faut leur dire sinon ils ne le sauront jamais. Faut avoir confiance en soi, se faire respecter. Dans le fond, on n'est pas toutes seules à vivre ça, si on en parlait plus entre femmes, au Centre ou ailleurs, on pourrait se serrer les coudes. Ce qu'on veut, c'est d'être égales, de ne pas toujours avoir à se battre, de ne pas toujours se sentir sur ses gardes. On veut se sentir à l'aise, prendre notre place sans être écrasées. On veut que les hommes soient à l'écoute des femmes et qu'ils arrêtent de penser qu'on est bonnes juste pour le ménage, le lavage, le ramassage pis la couchette. Au Centre, les femmes, on a décidé de se donner un lieu pour discuter, réfléchir ensemble sur des sujets qui nous intéressent. Là on peut s'exprimer à notre aise sur des choses dont on n'a pas souvent l'occasion de jaser: comme nos droits, nos peurs, la violence, le harcèlement, notre santé... Par ces rencontres, on se donne des trucs pour mieux prendre notre place dans le Centre, mieux se faire connaître. On fait entendre notre voix. En fait un comité des femmes, c'est pour la solidarité des femmes.

UN LIEU D'APPRENTISSAGE À LA HAUTEUR DES ASPIRATIONS DES FEMMES

Des ateliers conçus pour et par les femmes, une idée qui se définit au fur et à mesure de l'expérimentation

L'équipe d'Atout-lire[8] a voulu faciliter l'accès à la formation en ouvrant un atelier supplémentaire le jour, après avoir constaté que la peur de traverser les rues du quartier la nuit faisait obstacle à l'alphabétisation de plusieurs femmes. Grâce à cette initiative, le femmes inscrites dans le groupe «avancé» ont désormais le choix de travailler dans un atelier mixte ou non mixte.

À La Jarnigoine, le groupe d'analphabètes fonctionnels est, depuis deux ans, constitué par des femmes uniquement bien qu'il ait été ouvert à tous[9]. Ces femmes ont créé une atmosphère de confiance et ont su se faire reconnaître. Complices et solidaires, elles ont appris graduellement à définir le contenu de l'atelier en fonction de leur vécu, de leurs valeurs et de leurs champs d'intérêt.

Dans les deux centres, ce qui apparaît au départ comme un simple concours de circonstances se transforme vite en une volonté commune d'exercer une prise de pouvoir sur la réalité. Les participantes veulent créer un lieu d'apprentissage à la mesure de leurs désirs et à la hauteur de leurs aspirations. L'idée, le concept même de ces ateliers, se définit au fur et à mesure de l'expérimentation.

Apprendre, c'est communiquer avec les autres

Dans les ateliers, les animatrices constatent peu à peu l'importance de cerner les facteurs qui pourront interagir au cours de la démarche d'alphabétisation. Qu'est-ce qui influence l'apprentissage? Qu'est-ce qui limite ou augmente les chances de réussite? Peut-on résoudre plus facilement certaines difficultés en créant des ateliers spécialement conçus pour les femmes?

Pour ces dernières, la décision de s'alphabétiser découle souvent d'une situation de changement et est directement liée à une volonté irréversible de prise en charge et d'autonomie. Quelles qu'en soient les raisons — décès du conjoint, éclatement du couple, entrée des enfants à l'école, désir d'accéder au marché du travail — cette décision donne lieu à des prises de conscience douloureuses pour la femme. Elle lui révèle souvent brutalement que les facteurs à l'origine de son analphabétisme et de l'extrême précarité de ses conditions de vie — apprentissages sexistes, division sexuelle du travail, espace restreint, tâches répétitives, isolement, dépendance économique et non-reconnaissance de ses acquis — sont déterminés par la place que les femmes occupent dans la société et par le rôle qu'elles y jouent.

Leur principale motivation lorsqu'il s'agit d'entreprendre une démarche d'alphabétisation est souvent de rompre avec leur passé. Elles doivent désormais s'imposer, briser certaines habitudes, refuser d'être constamment disponibles, s'accorder du temps et recréer leur espace affectif. Ces changements risquent à leur tour d'entraîner des réactions de la part de leur entourage qui, dans bien des cas, ne les accepte pas. Les pressions extérieures intensifient leurs doutes quant à leur capacité d'apprendre et souvent les découragent systématiquement. Au fur et à mesure, les animatrices aident ces femmes à créer un climat de confiance leur permettant d'articuler clairement leurs motivations et de les utiliser comme source de stimulation.

Si l'on veut puiser à même ses expériences les ressources facilitant l'acquisition de nouvelles connaissances, il faut d'abord en reconnaître la valeur. On remarque que les femmes analphabètes ont une tendance particulièrement marquée à nier la valeur des habiletés intellectuelles qu'elles ont développées dans leurs activités. Chez elles, le manque de confiance est renforcé par la non-reconnaissance de leur participation à la vie culturelle et sociale. Elles ont une image négative d'elles-mêmes qui conditionne fortement leurs dispositions à l'apprentissage.

En atelier, on cherche à découvrir avec elles les diverses formes de savoir qu'elles ont acquis, entre autres, à travers des tâches précises comme la planification et l'organisation au sein de la famille ainsi que l'éducation des enfants. On valorise leur rôle dans les relations interpersonnelles. Peu à peu, elles se font plus confiance et établissent le contact avec un monde intérieur qu'elles désirent partager. Elles vont au-delà de la simple acquisition d'une habileté particulière, la maîtrise du code écrit, et expriment ce qu'elles sentent, ce qu'elles pensent et ce qu'elles vivent.

Des outils conformes à leurs attentes en situation d'apprentissage

Les expériences pédagogiques qui suivent illustrent bien comment le fait de tenir compte du vécu et des attitudes des femmes dans la pratique d'alphabétisation influence le contenu ainsi que l'orientation des ateliers et détermine la place de même que le rôle des participantes dans le choix des thèmes et des méthodes.

Au centre Atout-lire, on organise des ateliers thématiques à partir de préoccupations concernant l'ensemble des femmes du groupe. Dans ces ateliers, on fait une très large part à l'expression verbale des participantes. Les séances de travail sont construites à partir de thèmes choisis par les femmes. D'abord liées aux rapports vécus avec l'entourage, les discussions s'orientent peu à peu vers la condition des femmes pour enfin déboucher sur les relations qu'elles entretiennent au sein de la société. On remarque que la participation des femmes immigrantes aux ateliers donne lieu à des

échanges d'opinions plus diversifiés. Les ateliers thématiques, conçus en fonction des besoins, des champs d'intérêt et des préoccupations des femmes, les stimulent à aller chercher de l'information dans d'autres groupes et à la partager ensuite avec les membres du groupe. Les exercices de lecture et d'écriture se greffent aux diverses activités organisées.

À La Jarnigoine, l'atelier des femmes a participé à la rédaction d'un guide destiné à faciliter le travail de sensibilisation et d'orientation des animatrices dans les maisons d'hébergement et dans les centres de jour. Les femmes analphabètes prennent d'abord connaissance de l'ensemble du projet, puis y participent activement en rédigeant un texte collectif. Ainsi, elles font valoir leur expérience en tant que participantes dans un groupe d'alphabétisation et réinvestissent leur apprentissage dans une activité à caractère social. Elles sont particulièrement fières de leur participation.

Cette expérience est fondée sur l'expression orale de chaque participante et sa réussite tient en grande partie au désir de chacune d'exprimer et de partager ses idées. On parle à tour de rôle, on compose des phrases qui traduisent ce que l'on pense. L'intérêt porté aux discussions et à la communication avec les autres permet de prendre une distance par rapport à l'écriture. On oublie presque qu'on est en train d'écrire. L'apprentissage des notions grammaticales et de l'orthographe n'intervient qu'à la dernière étape du travail.

LE POUVOIR ENTRE LES MAINS[10]

Autrefois j'étais une illettrée sans savoir compter, ni lire, ni écrire; c'était très dur pour moi; ça m'a fait réfléchir; je n'étais pas plus bête qu'un autre; c'est là que je me suis décidée à prendre des cours.

Je suis très heureuse de pouvoir lire et écrire, ça me donne un but dans ma vie et le courage de foncer. C'est pas facile. C'est pour moi une satisfaction. Maintenant, en sachant mieux lire et écrire, cela me donne confiance en moi pour affronter des situations que je considère très embarrassantes; par exemple, quand mon filleul me demande de lui lire une histoire avant de s'endormir.

Cela a beaucoup d'importance pour moi de voir que je peux me débrouiller et de pouvoir parler de beaucoup de choses.

La nécessité de savoir lire et écrire, c'est pour avoir un meilleur emploi et un meilleur salaire.

Je suis fière de moi.

Enfin! Je n'ai plus peur d'écrire.

Louise Nadon
Évelyne Petit
Sylvie Sévigny

À La Gigogne, des ateliers d'alphabétisation dans une maison d'hébergement[11]

Le recrutement des femmes analphabètes se fait principalement à La Gigogne. Les animatrices de la maison d'hébergement sont en mesure de donner de l'information sur les ateliers d'alphabétisation et de mettre les responsables de ces ateliers en relation avec les femmes intéressées. Il arrive souvent que ces dernières aient des connaissances ou des amies qui sont aussi analphabètes. On travaille également en collaboration avec le CLSC* et d'autres organismes communautaires qui sont en contact avec des personnes pouvant bénéficier de ce service.

Depuis deux ans, deux animatrices en alphabétisation coaniment un atelier regroupant des analphabètes fonctionnelles et complètes. Les plus avancées viennent en aide à celles qui le sont moins, les discussions s'en trouvent enrichies et la vie de groupe devient beaucoup plus intéressante. Pour les animatrices, il importe d'utiliser les capacités et les affinités. On note une progression plus rapide, surtout chez les analphabètes complètes.

Étant donné que les activités se déroulent sur une journée, on peut y aller à fond dans l'élaboration d'un thème et boucler en quelque sorte ce qu'on a entrepris. En gros, l'apprentissage se fait à partir d'une démarche de croissance personnelle.

Après qu'on a défini les besoins et discuté avec chacune des personnes, des thèmes correspondant aux besoins individuels et aux sujets qui intéressent l'ensemble du groupe sont dégagés. C'est en fait le dénominateur commun qu'il faut trouver.

S'il arrive qu'un problème ne concerne pas plus d'une personne, on prévoit un mécanisme d'aide individuelle. Les activités qui se rattachent au thème doivent favoriser l'apprentissage du code grammatical et linguistique, du calcul de base, du système métrique, de l'expression orale, de la réflexion, et amener une compréhension nouvelle du thème, une application concrète des apprentissages dans la vie quotidienne et l'adoption de nouvelles attitudes.

Il y a différents blocs d'activités dans une journée. L'avant-midi est surtout consacré à ce qui pourrait ressembler à de la thérapie de groupe, bien que l'on se serve de toutes les occasions possibles pour écrire (journal personnel), lire (textes qui viennent compléter l'information) et s'exprimer.

Quand on parle de soi, de ses peurs, de ses interrogations, de ses désirs, on se laisse prendre au jeu. Ainsi à l'écrit, on améliore la construction

* Centre local de services communautaires.

de ses phrases, on corrige ses fautes et on apprend des mots nouveaux; de plus, on parle pour être comprise par les autres, on apprend à avoir confiance en soi, à comprendre la réalité des autres et à la respecter. Évidemment, toutes ne sont pas au même niveau, ce qui enrichit tout le monde.

Durant l'après-midi, une période est consacrée aux travaux pratiques: comment remplir un chèque, adresser une enveloppe, lire un patron; une autre est consacrée au calcul et au système métrique. Enfin, il y a celle qui est réservée aux exercices grammaticaux, où chacune peut travailler à son rythme ses difficultés.

Avant de se quitter, on évalue son cheminement et on parle des tâches qu'on aura à accomplir durant la semaine: travaux de lecture et d'écriture, mais aussi défis à relever.

Pendant la semaine, on essaie de faire des choses que l'on n'a jamais osé faire et on partage l'expérience avec les autres à la rencontre suivante.

On termine en général la session par un voyage ou une activité qui a pour but d'élargir sa vision du monde, de s'ouvrir à d'autres réalités et d'aller un peu plus loin que ce qu'on a toujours connu.

UN BESOIN MANIFESTE: LA CONCERTATION

Une femme victime de violence peut être bloquée dans ses démarches si elle est analphabète. Une femme analphabète peut avoir des difficultés d'apprentissage si elle est victime de violence.

Au cours des dernières années, les femmes ont mis sur pied un réseau de groupes de services et de pression où elles ont milité en fonction des priorités qu'elles avaient définies. À l'automne de 1986, l'équipe de La Jarnigoine décidait d'ajouter un volet à ses activités d'éducation populaire en élaborant un projet conjoint avec d'autres groupes de femmes afin de comprendre comment, dans les faits, on peut inscrire la lutte contre l'analphabétisme dans une stratégie plus globale d'action pour le changement des conditions de vie des femmes.

Grâce à cette activité, on veut comprendre l'importance de l'analphabétisme dans des situations où il n'apparaît pas nécessairement comme un problème grave ou prioritaire. On veut cerner ses manifestations et ses conséquences afin de sensibiliser les animatrices des groupes de femmes à la nécessité de se pencher conjointement sur l'ensemble des problèmes des femmes analphabètes et de formuler avec elles des revendications concernant leur situation «dans une société où le savoir est supposément égalitaire et démocratisé». On veut permettre aux femmes de se rassembler, d'exprimer ce qu'elles vivent et de s'organiser collectivement. On veut créer un réseau de dépistage, de soutien et d'orientation.

Pour des raisons pratiques, l'équipe de La Jarnigoine décide d'abord de s'adresser aux maisons d'hébergement et aux centres de jour: le type d'activités offertes par ces organismes semble propice à la mise sur pied d'activités d'alphabétisation adaptées à la démarche déjà entreprise par le groupe. On met sur pied une équipe volante chargée de déterminer quelles sont les ressources en alphabétisation que peut offrir un groupe populaire, en tenant compte à la fois de ses moyens et des besoins des animatrices et des participantes en maison d'hébergement et en centre de jour.

L'équipe de La Jarnigoine contacte une trentaine d'organismes situés dans l'île de Montréal et leur propose d'aller les rencontrer, de leur présenter une vidéo sur l'analphabétisme et d'animer une séance d'information. Conçue sous forme de volets thématiques — «L'analphabétisme, un fait social»; «Qui sont les personnes analphabètes?»; «Le caractère particulier de l'analphabétisme chez les femmes»; «Les ressources en alphabétisation» — la séance d'information s'avère un outil de communication souple et efficace. En s'adressant à la fois aux femmes victimes de violence et analphabètes et aux animatrices des organismes, on crée un lieu d'échange permettant aux premières de se dévoiler et aux secondes de découvrir les techniques de dépistage, les sources d'information et les ressources qui leur font actuellement défaut. On se penche sur les réalités sociales et politiques qui ont des effets sur la scolarisation et sur le processus d'alphabétisation. Ensemble, on définit les besoins des femmes analphabètes dans la démarche d'autonomie entreprise au centre qu'elles fréquentent: signer un bail, chercher un emploi, effectuer des opérations bancaires, entreprendre des démarches juridiques, s'inscrire à des cours, et ce afin de leur offrir des ressources adéquates.

Si la séance d'information s'intègre bien au fonctionnement des centres de jour et répond aux attentes des participantes, elle se révèle difficilement conciliable avec le travail effectué dans les maisons d'hébergement, qui vivent quotidiennement des situations de crise et de stress indescriptibles. Les multiples problèmes des femmes et l'urgence de leur situation mobilisent toute l'énergie disponible.

Néanmoins, conscientes des problèmes engendrés par l'analphabétisme et des obstacles infranchissables qui paralysent les résidentes dans leurs démarches, les animatrices des maisons d'hébergement manifestent le désir d'être formées afin de pouvoir agir sur place et atténuer la honte, la peur et l'impuissance de ces femmes. D'un commun accord, on suspend donc les rencontres et on élabore ensemble des outils visant à faciliter le travail auprès des femmes analphabètes.

On expérimente dans les groupes un questionnaire qui porte essentiellement sur les obstacles que les femmes ont à surmonter lorsqu'elles entreprennent des démarches: quelles sont les contraintes et les limites

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imposées par une déficience dans la maîtrise de la lecture, de l'écriture et du calcul? Ce questionnaire aide les animatrices des maisons d'hébergement à aborder un sujet qu'on préfère souvent oublier. En déterminant clairement quels sont les obstacles rencontrés par les femmes analphabètes, on agit concrètement et rapidement.

On attend une deuxième version du questionnaire avant d'inciter un plus grand nombre d'animatrices à l'utiliser. Il semble actuellement être un outil de sensibilisation et de communication valable entre participantes et animatrices. Il brise l'isolement et encourage les femmes à poursuivre leurs démarches.

Par ailleurs, afin de répondre au besoin de formation exprimé par les animatrices, on produit un document de soutien[12] qu'on distribue aux groupes susceptibles d'être intéressés par la question. Ce document vise à sensibiliser les animatrices des maisons d'hébergement au caractère social de l'analphabétisme, aux difficultés des femmes analphabètes et au travail effectué par les groupes populaires d'alphabétisation, cela afin qu'elles puissent faciliter le dépistage.

On organise des rencontres avec les centres qui ont participé au projet afin de discuter de ses répercussions et des possibilités de travailler conjointement. On échange sur ses pratiques, on tente d'éclaircir certains points de la recherche théorique et on évalue les possibilités d'ajouter des ateliers d'alphabétisation aux activités des maisons d'hébergement. Cette dernière question soulève d'ailleurs des controverses. L'équipe volante de La Jarnigoine émet certaines réserves, sur le plan tant pratique que pédagogique, quant à l'utilité et l'efficacité d'un tel atelier.

Il est intéressant de comparer les observations de La Jarnigoine avec le témoignage de l'équipe de La Gigogne, qui a pris l'initiative de mettre sur pied ce genre d'atelier. Pour les deux équipes, l'objectif de départ était le même: agir en tenant compte à la fois de la violence et de l'analphabétisme. Les contextes, eux, sont différents et, semble-t-il, déterminants dans les conclusions que l'on tire.

La mise sur pied d'ateliers conçus et animés conjointement avec des animatrices qui travaillent auprès des femmes victimes de violence dans les maisons d'hébergement demeure, pour l'équipe de La Jarnigoine, un objectif réalisable, mais à long terme. Au cours du projet, les animatrices en alphabétisation comprennent qu'il faut d'abord effectuer un travail d'information et de sensibilisation avant d'instaurer des ateliers à l'extérieur des groupes populaires ou des établissements d'enseignement. On pense qu'il est préférable, dans un premier temps, d'offrir des ressources exigeant moins d'organisation, de financement et d'énergie, comme la production d'une vidéo portant à la fois sur l'analphabétisme et sur la violence, qui serait distribuée dans tous les centres de femmes.

L'équipe de La Jarnigoine s'interroge également sur l'aspect pédagogique de son action. Elle distingue deux types d'action: des actions ponctuelles, qui aident les femmes à effectuer certaines démarches urgentes, et la mise sur pied d'ateliers impliquant une démarche d'alphabétisation échelonnée sur plusieurs mois, voire plusieurs années. La première possibilité lui apparaît cependant plus réaliste et mieux adaptée au contexte des maisons d'hébergement.

Pour l'équipe de La Jarnigoine, apprendre à lire, à écrire et à calculer est difficile, parfois même ardu, et ne peut se faire que dans certaines conditions. Pour se concentrer, il faut, tout au moins temporairement, se dégager de certaines préoccupations. Avant d'entreprendre une telle démarche, on doit tenir compte de facteurs, comme la disponibilité, la sécurité et la stabilité, qui influencent l'apprentissage. C'est pour ces raisons qu'on en vient à la conclusion qu'il serait probablement préférable, dans un premier temps, d'inciter les groupes populaires d'alphabétisation à donner eux-mêmes ces ateliers plutôt que les maisons d'hébergement, qui ne peuvent constituer un lieu propice.

Notons que cette hypothèse n'a pu être vérifiée en pratique. C'est aux limites de ce projet que vient se juxtaposer l'expérience de La Gigogne faisant valoir le point de vue d'une maison d'hébergement qui a su, grâce à l'alphabétisation-conscientisation, utiliser le lien entre la violence et l'analphabétisme et agir globalement pour solutionner les problèmes des résidentes.

L'ALPHABÉTISATION-CONSCIENTISATION À LA GIGOGNE[13]

Au départ, La Gigogne se voulait une maison conçue, organisée et gérée par des femmes victimes de violence, issues d'une classe sociale défavorisée, soutenues dans leur action par quelques animatrices. C'est à la demande de femmes membres de l'organisme qu'on a constitué un premier groupe d'analphabètes fonctionnelles à l'automne de 1982.

Ces femmes étaient à la tête de familles monoparentales, peu scolarisées, économiquement pauvres, et avaient, pour la plupart, connu la violence sous l'une ou l'autre de ses formes. Toutefois ce portrait n'est pas statique; il a évolué avec les années. Plusieurs de ces femmes, tout en étant encore majoritairement chefs de famille, ont suivi une formation, ont repris leurs études et occupent maintenant des emplois rémunérés à La Gigogne ou ailleurs. Leur qualité de vie en général s'est grandement améliorée. On parle évidemment ici des membres de La Gigogne qui sont restées solidaires depuis quelques années; pour celles qui rejoignent l'équipe en cours de route, la démarche est presque toujours à recommencer.

Le portrait de l'alphabétisation-conscientisation a également évolué à La Gigogne. Les premiers ateliers n'ont pas fait leur apparition par

hasard. Ils sont nés de la volonté de prise en charge de La Gigogne par ses membres. Dans leur démarche vers l'autonomie, malgré tous leurs efforts pour se prendre en main, le fait de ne pas maîtriser adéquatement la langue écrite et parlée fermait plusieurs portes à ces femmes. Comment animer, renseigner les autres, faire une émission de radio ou de télévision, organiser une conférence de presse, s'occuper de la correspondance, se documenter, se faire une opinion sur des sujets tels que la violence, l'avortement, la dépression nerveuse, etc.? Et tout ça, quand l'estime de soi est à son plus bas niveau.

L'apprentissage de la lecture et de l'écriture s'est fait à partir des tâches rendues nécessaires par le fonctionnement d'une maison d'hébergement en plein démarrage. L'importance de ce projet réside dans le fait qu'il a été la source de motivation qui a favorisé les apprentissages, l'endroit idéal de leur réinvestissement et le lieu où est née une conscience plus critique.

Deux ans après, étant donné que des femmes ne sachant ni lire ni écrire, ou très peu, commençaient à entrer en contact avec La Gigogne, une deuxième animatrice en alphabétisation s'est ajoutée et on a pu accueillir les analphabètes complètes.

Actuellement, on offre toujours des ateliers aux membres de La Gigogne, mais également à d'autres femmes de Matane qui vivent les mêmes situations. Les besoins changent avec les années et les groupes. Ou plutôt ce sont les circonstances qui changent, car les besoins profonds, eux, restent les mêmes.

On continue d'allier une pratique de conscientisation à l'alphabétisation. À quoi serviraient ces outils que sont la lecture et l'écriture si on n'acquérait pas en même temps les moyens de les utiliser? La connaissance de soi, la compréhension de ce qui se passe dans son environnement et la capacité d'y exercer une influence, l'amélioration de sa façon d'entrer en relation avec les autres et de communiquer, le développement de son potentiel personnel, l'apprentissage de la lecture, de l'écriture et du calcul sont les principales préoccupations de La Gigogne.

Partir du vécu des femmes, de là où elles sont, est sans doute ce qu'il y a de primordial dans la réalisation de ces objectifs. Selon les participantes, les thèmes peuvent être plus politiques ou plus près du quotidien, les apprentissages peuvent conduire à un engagement à La Gigogne ou dans un autre organisme, ou tout simplement dans sa vie personnelle.

À la lumière des deux initiatives, celles de La Jarnigoine et de La Gigogne, on constate que la prise de conscience et la volonté de changement des femmes analphabètes ont une influence non seulement dans le choix des projets, mais surtout dans la détermination de fournir des

ressources. On note qu'à La Gigogne, la réussite des ateliers tient en grande partie au fait qu'ils ont été mis sur pied à la demande des résidentes. De la même manière, le projet de La Jarnigoine prend toute sa valeur du fait qu'il vise, grâce à l'information et à la sensibilisation, à susciter justement cette prise de conscience et qu'il s'engage à appuyer concrètement les actions pouvant en découler. Ainsi, ce qui pourrait représenter une préoccupation supplémentaire et une surcharge de travail pour les animatrices des groupes de femmes devient un moyen d'action d'autant plus efficace qu'il permet de travailler en même temps à différentes facettes d'un même problème et encourage la concertation sur les diverses questions relatives aux femmes.

UN TRAVAIL EN CONSTANTE ÉVOLUTION

Ce texte et les expériences qui y sont relatées peuvent se comparer à la formule «work in progress» utilisée au théâtre. La réflexion portant sur les femmes analphabètes et les actions entreprises jusqu'à maintenant font partie d'un travail en constante évolution. Pratique et théorie se développent simultanément et s'alimentent mutuellement: les idées provoquent et justifient les actions; les expériences, elles, remettent la théorie en question et favorisent la réflexion.

Si les animatrices engagées auprès des femmes analphabètes veulent tracer un profil plus précis et plus complet de ces dernières, c'est essentiellement dans le but de créer des ressources adéquates et d'utiliser les moyens les plus efficaces afin de contrer le problème de l'analphabétisme dans son ensemble, afin de travailler plus précisément à l'amélioration des conditions de vie des femmes. Comme nous l'avons déjà mentionné, l'analphabétisme est un problème social grave qui touche à la fois les hommes et les femmes et concerne l'ensemble de la population. Les hommes et les femmes ont des problèmes communs, aussi sérieux pour les uns que pour les autres. La question ici n'est pas de les comparer ou de les mesurer, mais bien de comprendre les différences, souvent engendrées par la discrimination exercée par la société, afin d'élargir l'éventail de nos actions et d'augmenter nos chances de réussite.

Le tableau de la situation des femmes analphabètes peut paraître sombre, mais il n'en demeure pas moins juste et fidèle aux réalités de la majeure partie de celles qui fréquentent actuellement les groupes populaires. Conditionnées très jeunes par leur éducation, elles sont fortement influencées par les stéréotypes sexistes: elles se sentent à la fois responsables de l'organisation au sein de la famille et de la qualité des relations interpersonnelles. Elles sont seules face à des réalités difficiles à saisir. Si elles connaissent bien leur situation, la précarité de leurs conditions de vie bloque chez elles toute perspective de changement.

En entreprenant une démarche d'alphabétisation, elles brisent cet isolement; en communiquant avec les autres, elles prennent peu à peu conscience des raisons de leur choix, de leurs désirs et de leur volonté de changement. Dans bien des cas, ce sont les motivations des participantes qui déterminent la mise sur pied des activités conçues pour elles. En y participant activement, elles apprennent à utiliser ces ressources et à se les approprier graduellement.

À CLÉ et à Atout-lire, on a constaté que les femmes participaient davantage dans les ateliers et les diverses activités conçues pour elles. Elles peuvent parler de leur vécu et de leurs préoccupations, elles prennent leur place et s'ouvrent peu à peu à l'extérieur.

À La Gigogne, grâce à une des animatrices qui a mis sur pied un programme d'organisation communautaire au cégep*, certaines des participantes ont maintenant une attestation de travail et d'autres se sont inscrites à différents programmes après avoir terminé leur secondaire à l'éducation permanente.

Pour sa part, le projet de La Jarnigoine a été vécu comme une aventure: aucune certitude et des hypothèses maintes fois reformulées. Le seul repère: l'expérience des groupes travaillant déjà à combattre l'oppression des femmes. L'équipe volante a donc eu la possibilité d'aller vérifier la justesse de son action auprès de femmes qui partagent ses préoccupations sociopolitiques.

En tenant compte des expériences décrites, on comprend que l'analphabétisme chez les femmes ne peut être isolé de l'ensemble de leurs problèmes et que son étude suppose la compréhension de rapports sociaux complexes, rouages d'une mécanique géante. Quelles que soient les sphères d'action, que l'on travaille sur un plan individuel ou collectif, les actions et les recherches concernant les femmes analphabètes devraient s'inscrire dans les réalités sociales et rejoindre les préoccupations du mouvement des femmes.

Les expériences décrites servent de modèles, de référence. Certaines d'entre elles pourraient être réexpérimentées au moment de l'élaboration de nouvelles stratégies, afin de bien déterminer où l'on veut agir, à quel aspect on veut travailler et de quelle façon. On peut les diviser en deux grandes catégories: les actions entreprises dans les centres d'alphabétisation, où l'on crée des activités uniquement pour les femmes, et les projets à caractère social élaborés conjointement avec d'autres groupes.

Ainsi, un groupe pourrait décider de mettre sur pied une activité spéciale pendant une campagne électorale afin d'informer les femmes sur

* Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel.

les enjeux les concernant plus particulièrement. On pourrait inviter des candidates pour discuter de certains dossiers, participer à des rencontres publiques ou rencontrer des groupes de femmes engagées dans la campagne.

On pourrait également faciliter l'accès des femmes aux ressources communautaires comme activité de postalphabétisation (aide juridique, associations de locataires, regroupements d'assistés sociaux, comités d'action-chômage, centres de santé des femmes, programmes de réinsertion sur le marché du travail) ou favoriser leur engagement dans la communauté (comités de parents, collectifs de femmes immigrantes, associations de locataires ou comités de citoyens).

On pourrait par ailleurs organiser des groupes de pression afin d'influencer les décisions politiques concernant la lutte des femmes contre l'analphabétisme et étudier les campagnes et programmes d'alphabétisation destinés aux femmes qui ont été expérimentés dans d'autres pays, dans le but de mieux nous adapter à une réalité qui déborde nos frontières nationales.

D'autres groupes pourraient se pencher plus particulièrement sur certaines lois concernant les femmes afin d'en comprendre les conséquences sur leur alphabétisation, par exemple les mesures concernant les garderies, l'éducation permanente, l'aide sociale ou l'assurance-chômage.

La place que l'on accordera aux réalités des femmes analphabètes sera en grande partie déterminée par l'énergie que l'on consacrera à développer le savoir-faire des groupes de femmes, à poursuivre la réflexion amorcée par les centres d'éducation populaire, à enrichir les expériences, à définir de nouvelles pistes de recherche et à faire connaître et reconnaître le problème. Cette tâche ne peut être accomplie que par la présence accrue des femmes aux manifestations publiques et par leur engagement dans des projets mis sur pied dans une perspective de concertation.

L'auteure remercie toutes celles qui ont bien voulu partager leur expérience, de même que Christiane Tremblay et Maryse Perreault pour leur lecture attentive et leurs commentaires. On peut trouver tous les documents mentionnés au Centre de documentation en éducation des adultes et en condition féminine[14].

NOTES

1. Ces observations ont été faites dans les groupes populaires d'alphabétisation CLÉ et La Jarnigoine, situés respectivement sur le plateau Mont-Royal et dans le quartier Villeray à Montréal.

2. BOUCHER, Andrée, Nicole GLADU, et Josée REID, *L'école ça me rentrait pas dans la tête*, Montréal, Centre de lecture et d'écriture, 1984 [CLÉ, 3684, rue Mentana, Montréal, H2L 3R3; tél. : (514) 527-9097].

3. DE COSTER, Élise, et Hélène OUELLETTE, La Jarnigoine, 6815, rue Saint-Denis, Montréal, H2S 2S3; tél. : (514) 273-6683.

4. Atout-lire, 325, rue Sainte-Thérèse, Québec, G1K 1M9; tél. : (418) 524-9353.

5. La Gigogne à Matane.

6. Cf. GLADU, Nicole, *Une démarche féministe en alphabétisation*, Montréal, CLÉ, 1988; GLADU, Nicole, et Francine PELLETIER, *Portraits de femmes analphabètes*, Montréal, 1988; GLADU, Nicole, *L'accessibilité des femmes à l'alphabétisation*, Montréal, 1988.

7. Texte collectif écrit du Comité femmes, publié en 1987 dans l'agenda de CLÉ.

8. L'atelier des femmes d'Atout-lire a été mis sur pied en 1984 et Francine Loignon l'anime depuis deux ans.

9. L'animatrice était Hélène Ouellette.

10. Texte collectif des participantes de La Jarnigoine.

11. Extraits d'un texte de Lise Allard, « L'alphabétisation-conscientisation à La Gigogne », *Alpha Liaison*, vol. 7, mars 1987.

12. *Le pouvoir entre les mains*, Montréal, La Jarnigoine, 1989.

13. Extrait de Lise Allard, *op. cit.*

14. CDEACF, 1265, rue Berri, bureau 340, Montréal, H2L 4X4; tél. : (514) 844-3674.

TRAVAILLER AUPRÈS DE JEUNES ANALPHABÈTES À LA BOÎTE À LETTRES (1983-1987)

Sylvie Roy
Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec
Québec

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INTRODUCTION

Mon expérience à la Boîte à lettres de Longueuil s'étend de la « gestation » de l'organisme en mai 1983 (nous étions alors quatre diplômés en orthopédagogie de l'Université du Québec à Montréal) jusqu'à mon départ en juin 1987. Quatre années remplies de découvertes, de réalisations, de satisfactions et de questionnements. Quatre années parmi les plus belles de ma vie. La Boîte à lettres existe toujours, mais je parlerai peu de ce qui s'y fait maintenant, puisque c'est une autre équipe qui l'anime et la coordonne.

Le présent article s'articule autour des constatations suivantes:

— L'alphabétisation des jeunes est une tâche extrêmement difficile. Les jeunes nous arrivent après six, sept ou dix ans d'échecs scolaires qui les ont ancrés dans un sentiment d'impuissance. Et force est de constater que la responsabilité de l'échec ne peut être attribuée uniquement à l'école. Malgré toutes nos stratégies pédagogiques et nos efforts, l'alphabétisation demeure pénible et peu porteuse de réussite. Très peu de jeunes ont quitté la Boîte à lettres en sachant lire et écrire convenablement. Que les progrès soient si minimes est décourageant autant pour les jeunes que pour nous. Le fait d'être dans un lieu extra-scolaire, de constituer de petits groupes, d'associer la lecture aux besoins, ne constitue pas des conditions suffisantes pour intégrer la lecture et l'écriture dans la vie des jeunes analphabètes. Nos prétentions à transmettre « la » culture ne rejoignent pas tout le monde. Il faudra acquérir beaucoup de patience, expérimenter de nouvelles approches et stratégies pour réussir l'alphabétisation des jeunes déjà scolarisés.

— Les jeunes ne sont pas faciles à recruter et ils abandonnent facilement la démarche d'alphabétisation. Pour un jeune qui s'alphabétise, il y en a peut-être sept ou davantage qui s'y refusent. Ce n'est pas uniquement une question de gêne ou de honte, mais aussi de volonté d'acquérir ce savoir. Il y a beaucoup de personnes analphabètes qui fonctionnent dans la société sans éprouver le besoin d'apprendre à lire. La radio, la télévision, la transmission orale des savoirs contribuent, malgré tout, à l'insertion des personnes analphabètes. Cependant, la société est organisée en fonction de l'écriture et de ce fait, elle tend à exclure ceux qui n'en maîtrisent pas l'usage.

— Les jeunes analphabètes ont souvent des besoins urgents à combler autres que l'alphabétisation. Si notre travail a eu des résultats, c'est justement dans la satisfaction de besoins affectifs ou sociaux: les jeunes qui sont passés chez nous sont plus à l'aise, plus autonomes, prennent des responsabilités, se font davantage confiance, trouvent un emploi, etc. L'alphabétisation n'apporte pas de résultat aussi concret ou immédiat, et cela paraît secondaire par rapport aux autres besoins. Les deux besoins les plus importants pour ces jeunes demeurent le travail et les relations sociales et amoureuses (comme pour nous tous d'ailleurs). C'est en comblant ces besoins que les jeunes trouveront une certaine place dans la société, une reconnaissance et une valorisation.

Constatations défaitistes? Je ne le pense pas. Mais il faut admettre que nous dispensons un savoir que plusieurs ne jugent pas indispensable à leur vie, un savoir relégué aux oubliettes à cause de besoins plus concrets, un savoir qui se transmet lentement et difficilement à cause de certaines barrières culturelles. Sans stratégie d'intervention auprès des jeunes, l'alphabétisation est une coquille vidée de sa substance, une tâche «scolaire» vouée à l'échec sur tous les plans. Les stratégies d'intervention consistent à faire en sorte que les jeunes viennent à l'organisme, y restent, y reviennent, y acquièrent des savoir-faire, le sens de la vie de groupe, y réalisent des projets individuels et collectifs.

Cet article brosse d'abord un bref tableau de la Boîte à lettres, puis quelques portraits de jeunes analphabètes, suivis de commentaires. J'y présente ensuite quelques conseils sur la façon de travailler auprès de jeunes dans un groupe populaire d'alphabétisation.

La Boîte à lettres est un organisme populaire fondé en 1983 qui s'est donné comme mandat d'alphabétiser les jeunes analphabètes. La population visée, au départ les jeunes de 16 à 22 ans, s'est élargie aux personnes de moins de 30 ans. L'équipe est composée de 3 ou 4 animateurs qui reçoivent chaque année entre 20 et 30 jeunes. La Boîte à lettres est membre du Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec (RGPAQ).

Le concept d'alphabétisation populaire déborde largement le cadre pédagogique et il sous-tend l'ensemble de notre travail. Louise Miller, permanente du RGPAQ, le définissait ainsi à la conférence internationale de Toronto, en septembre 1987:

> «Le concept d'alphabétisation populaire que nous avons adopté implique que le participant doit être partie prenante de sa formation ainsi que de son lieu de formation. Trois grandes dimensions sont présentes en alphabétisation populaire. La première est pédagogique et élargit la formation en ce sens que l'alphabétisation ne peut se résumer aux

simples apprentissages de la lecture, de l'écriture et du calcul. Elle vise aussi le développement des connaissances générales, pratiques, politiques, sociales et personnelles. Elle vise à donner aux individus les connaissances nécessaires afin qu'ils soient mieux en mesure de contrôler leurs conditions de travail et de vie. Pour nous, cette dimension ne peut se réaliser intégralement que dans une démarche collective à l'intérieur de laquelle le participant a un rôle actif et non passif.

«La seconde dimension est politique. Nous visons principalement à rejoindre les personnes ou les milieux qui ne contrôlent pas les outils essentiels pour améliorer leurs conditions de travail et de vie. L'alphabétisation populaire vise le développement d'une conscience sociale et politique chez les participants en développant des capacités d'analyse critique, de choix d'action et d'évaluation.

«La troisième dimension est l'engagement social. Nous devons constamment avoir comme objectif de sensibiliser la population au problème de l'analphabétisme et nous devons lutter pour faire reconnaître les droits des personnes analphabètes.»

Voici des exemples illustrant comment cette définition est vécue dans le quotidien à la Boîte à lettres.

— Nous avons mis sur pied des **projets collectifs** qui débordent le cadre des cours. Le projet constitue quelque chose de commun à l'ensemble de l'organisme, où chacun contribue selon ses possibilités et prend des responsabilités dans le but de réaliser le projet. En 1985, nous avons produit une vidéo, en 1987 un journal, en 1989 un calendrier. Tous les projets se prolongent dans le temps: animation autour de la vidéo pendant plus d'un an, distribution du journal, vente du calendrier, etc. Les projets font appel à la participation des jeunes, leur donnent l'occasion d'exprimer ce qu'ils ressentent, de se valoriser. Ces projets ont permis de donner à l'écriture et à la lecture une utilité réelle sur le plan de la communication.

— Nous essayons d'**élargir les connaissances générales**. Sans intérêt et sans curiosité intellectuelle, la motivation s'émousse vite. Quand un jeune n'est pas situé dans le temps et dans l'espace, qu'il se contente d'une information provenant de rumeurs, il est bien difficile de lui apprendre à lire. Il faut habituer les jeunes à ne plus se fier uniquement à l'oral dans l'acquisition des connaissances, en leur transmettant le goût de vérifier les faits et de s'informer par eux-mêmes dans les livres. Par des soirées d'information, des présentations de vidéos, des discussions, nous avons essayé de donner un corps, une «matière» à l'apprentissage de

la lecture. En 1984 et 1985, la Boîte à lettres a organisé des soirées à thème qui réunissaient tous les participants intéressés. Parmi les sujets discutés, notons l'échec scolaire, les vacances, les loisirs en ville, la consommation, la sexualité et l'ordinateur. Ces soirées, très appréciées, étaient l'occasion de connaître les ressources du milieu.

— Nous avons toujours adapté le matériel pédagogique à la réalité des jeunes. Nous avons utilisé les paroles des jeunes pour élaborer des textes et leur montrer que ce qu'ils disaient pouvait s'écrire. Nous privilégions de même l'**écriture de textes personnels**. Que ce soit par un projet de livre, un cahier de poésie ou un journal personnel, nous avons encouragé les jeunes à écrire et nous nous sommes servis de ce matériel comme texte de lecture. Ce matériel nous renseignait sur la façon dont s'articule la pensée des jeunes à l'écriture, le vocabulaire utilisé, les erreurs généralement commises. Ces données précieuses permettaient une correction et un enseignement selon le niveau réel d'écriture.

— Nous avons accordé une grande importance à la **sensibilisation du milieu**. Nous avons écrit sur notre travail, publié des rapports d'expérience, des analyses. Nous avons rarement refusé les entrevues avec les médias pour faire connaître le problème des jeunes analphabètes.

— La Boîte à lettres a toujours cherché à faire **participer les jeunes** à la gestion de l'organisme. Il y a eu de deux à quatre assemblées générales par année avec les jeunes et formation d'un comité des jeunes d'octobre 1984 à mai 1987. Le conseil d'administration a intégré des jeunes en septembre 1987, et les sélections de personnel se sont effectuées avec la participation des jeunes.

LES JEUNES

1. Portraits individuels

Pierre

Pierre vient d'une famille de neuf enfants; ses parents sont peu scolarisés. Son père est routier à son compte et Pierre travaille avec lui en attendant de pouvoir acheter son propre camion. Il est musclé, imposant, fier de son corps, de ses nombreux tatouages et... de la liasse de billets qu'il cache dans ses chaussettes! Les classes spéciales ont commencé pour lui en cinquième année. Auparavant il était seulement «tannant», en retard par rapport aux autres et on le laissait dormir dans son coin. Il dit qu'il s'est senti bousculé par les multiples changements de méthode d'apprentissage, par le bruit dans les classes à aires ouvertes, par le travail individuel par fiches. Il a quitté l'école après le professionnel court parce qu'il ne voulait pas servir de main-d'œuvre à bon marché dans des stages de

travail non rémunérés. Il est camionneur et déménageur depuis ce temps, vivant parfois du chômage, parfois des allocations d'aide sociale... et aussi des payes «en-dessous de la table».

Pierre participe aux ateliers pendant un an avec plus ou moins d'assiduité, pour ensuite abandonner définitivement quand l'organisme quitte son quartier. Même s'il se sent enfin traité en égal par des «profs», son attitude spontanée le ramène au «niaisage» de son enfance.

Pierre a fréquenté quelque temps une fille analphabète, mais peut-être étaient-ils trop semblables pour que la relation dure. Plus tard il est venu nous présenter sa nouvelle «blonde» à l'occasion du party de Noël. Elle est plus vieille que lui, et elle a un fils de six ans. De plus, elle sait lire et écrire et s'exprime facilement. Pierre offre sa force physique, son travail; sa «blonde» offre ses compétences en lecture et écriture, et parfois ses qualités d'interprète quand Pierre cherche ses mots. On ne peut que constater le beau partage des forces... Mais Pierre n'a plus aucune motivation à s'alphabétiser, s'il en avait déjà eu.

Luc

Luc est arrivé à la Boîte à lettres à 22 ans, avec ses 6 pieds 2 et ses 200 livres, en traînant un petit bout de papier donné par un centre d'orientation: «ct'icitte l'école?» Il n'avait pas l'air trop convaincu en voyant les lieux! Sa femme venait d'accoucher, il voulait apprendre à lire pour aider son enfant plus tard. C'était un gars débrouillard et travailleur, très conscient de ses responsabilités de père de famille.

Luc avait fait les classes spéciales à partir de la quatrième année. On l'avait laissé tranquille jusqu'en troisième secondaire. «Je buvais, je sortais, je fumais; ils me foutaient la paix.» Il connaissait les lettres, reconnaissait quelques syllabes, mais recopiait à la perfection des phrases qu'il ne comprenait pas. Avec quelle application d'écolier il nous a écrit l'alphabet mural! Généralement il se comportait dans les ateliers comme le «tannant» de son enfance. Il le faisait sans méchanceté, parce que c'était le seul comportement qu'il connaissait. Il est resté trois semaines.

Nous l'avons revu par hasard quelques années plus tard... en prenant un taxi. Il avait obtenu son permis, l'auto était neuve et il en était très fier. Sa femme attendait son deuxième petit. Il nous a conduit sans problème à destination, même s'il ne savait pas lire. Il gagnait bien sa vie, semblait heureux, et le problème de l'analphabétisme n'avait pas l'air de lui peser... En fait, nous n'avons pas osé lui poser la question.

Jean

Jean, c'est un pilier de la Boîte à lettres. Il y est depuis 1984 et espère y être longtemps encore... Il vient à toutes les activités et à tous les ateliers.

C'est l'homme de confiance pour faire tous les bricolages nécessaires dans le local.

Jean reste chez ses parents, à qui il donne une pension. C'est un grand gars sociable, pas timide, qui s'habille dans des vêtements parfois criards et démodés. Il parle vite, mâche ses mots et on doit parfois le faire répéter afin de le comprendre.

Il cherche depuis longtemps du travail, mais ses expériences se limitent aux stages en milieux de travail offerts par le bureau d'aide sociale. Avec quel enthousiasme il nous racontait les promesses d'emploi des patrons! On essayait de le rendre plus réaliste, mais sans succès. Il nous revenait découragé et sans emploi au bout de quelques semaines. Un jour, il a eu un emploi par l'entremise d'un jeune de la Boîte à lettres, mais il l'a quitté au bout de six mois. On se demandait s'il n'aimait pas mieux faire des « jobines » que de s'astreindre à l'horaire de huit à quatre, au salaire minimum...

Les progrès de Jean en lecture et écriture ne sont pas évidents pour nous, alors que lui se déclare très satisfait. Pourtant, il ne comprend pas encore tout ce qu'il lit, il écrit sans respecter l'orthographe, ni la séparation des mots; il peut réussir des multiplications à trois chiffres mais se perdre dans un problème pratique. Pendant un an, il a réalisé un projet qui lui tenait à cœur: il a écrit un livre racontant, année après année, sa vie scolaire. Même s'il n'a que quelques pages, pour Jean, c'est un livre: « J'ai réussi à ordonner mes souvenirs, je me suis rendu compte que j'avais des choses dans la tête, ça m'a montré à réfléchir. » Il vend des exemplaires de son livre que nous avons illustré et photocopié, et il est même allé voir un libraire pour le faire éditer. Nous ne savons pas s'il faut le ramener à plus de réalisme ou le laisser être satisfait de lui, peut-être pour la première fois de sa vie.

Pour Jean, la Boîte à lettres représente un milieu de vie. Il se rappelle très précisément la date de son entrée, quelle robe je portais cette journée-là, et particulièrement ce moment où Pierre l'a écouté alors qu'il pensait à se suicider... Sa mémoire, étonnante de précision dans les évocations affectives, n'a pas la même capacité pour l'apprentissage de la lecture.

Alain

Alain est venu à la Boîte à lettres pendant deux ans et il est demeuré par la suite en contact avec nous de façon périodique. Il avait déjà suivi des cours d'alphabétisation pendant deux ans à l'éducation des adultes. Il était analphabète complet, et il l'est encore et le restera peut-être même s'il est intelligent, débrouillard et motivé.

Il a été placé en classe spéciale dès la deuxième année du primaire, année du divorce de ses parents. Il a terminé à 16 ans le professionnel court en ébénisterie, pour faire ensuite quelques stages en milieu de travail. Il a toujours poursuivi sa formation pour venir à bout de cet analphabétisme qu'il ne s'explique pas. Il a vu un médecin, passé une batterie de tests du cerveau, il a consulté un psychologue... Rien à faire. Les mots s'embrouillent toujours dans sa tête, il confond les sons, inverse les lettres et les syllabes, autant en lecture qu'en écriture.

Quand il est venu à la Boîte à lettres, à 23 ans, Alain était un gars timide, au vocabulaire restreint et répétitif. Il reprenait toujours la dernière phrase qu'on lui avait dite, sans y ajouter quoi que ce soit de personnel. Il travaillait, vivait seul en appartement, s'habillait avec soin. Il faisait tout pour être et se sentir «normal». Depuis ce temps, Alain a surmonté sa timidité, il rit, parle plus facilement et montre ses émotions. Les autres jeunes l'ont toujours considéré avec respect ; il a eu des responsabilités financières importantes dans le projet de la vidéo, ce qui l'a aidé à croire en ses capacités.

Pourtant, ses progrès en alphabétisation sont à peu près nuls, et il est bien difficile de savoir pourquoi. Problème émotif, neurologique? Lui dit toujours que c'est en raison de la fatigue ou de ses lunettes que ça ne va pas. Il a toujours un livre à la main, dit qu'il sait lire. Pour la lecture comme pour d'autres savoir-faire, Alain paraît incapable d'admettre ses lacunes. Cela semble au-dessus de ses forces. Il ne vient plus aux cours depuis un certain temps. Il a une «blonde» et trop de travail. Cela ne l'empêche pas d'avoir l'air un peu malheureux et de traîner comme un boulet ce qu'il pense être le problème de sa vie.

Gilles

Gilles est arrivé à la Boîte à lettres à 20 ans et est demeuré avec nous environ un an et demi. Il vient d'une famille de parents instruits et à l'aise. Son seul frère est, tout comme l'était Gilles, en adaptation scolaire. Gilles est un beau garçon qui s'habille à la toute dernière mode, conduit une auto de sport, s'exprime facilement et de façon structurée. Il a été considéré comme dyslexique dès la deuxième année du primaire et a suivi une démarche complexe et diversifiée de réadaptation scolaire, dont il parle avec cynisme et moquerie.

Son analphabétisme ne l'a pas empêché de suivre un cours de théâtre au collège, puisque sa mère faisait ses travaux. Il travaille dans un hôpital comme préposé aux bénéficiaires, et est de ce fait le seul syndiqué analphabète «jeune» que nous connaissons... Il a quitté la Boîte à lettres lorsqu'il a déménagé à Montréal avec sa «blonde», qui étudie à l'université. Les progrès de Gilles sont minces, mais il lit moins lentement et comprend mieux. L'analphabétisme ne semble d'ailleurs pas nuire à ses projets.

On peut se demander si le fait que Gilles vienne d'un milieu aisé ne lui donnera pas toutes les chances de réussir, malgré l'analphabétisme. Et si la confiance en soi, la curiosité intellectuelle et la richesse du vocabulaire, caractéristiques souvent associées aux milieux favorisés, ne seront pas des atouts bien plus importants que l'alphabétisation pour réussir.

Lucie

Lucie est arrivée à la Boîte à lettres à 18 ans, dès la fin de sa scolarité de classes spéciales et de ses stages en milieu de travail. C'est une fille timide et renfrognée. Elle est considérée comme déficiente légère et vit avec sa famille, qui l'aide peu. Elle est toujours bien habillée et bien coiffée, mais elle s'ennuie à longueur de journée. Elle ne reçoit pas d'allocation d'assistance sociale parce que son père dit qu'il est capable de la faire vivre. Ses activités consistent à flâner dans les centres commerciaux, à garder parfois des enfants et à venir régulièrement à la Boîte à lettres. Malgré son assiduité, ses progrès sont minces. On a l'impression qu'elle joue à l'école, qu'elle ne sait pas quoi faire de son temps et que ses parents s'en débarrassent en quelque sorte en nous la confiant. Après trois ans, nous l'avons orientée vers des activités de loisirs et de recherche d'emploi, parce qu'il n'y avait pas de débouché à son apprentissage et qu'on ne pouvait répondre à ses besoins d'insertion sociale.

Lucie a vécu son retrait de l'organisme comme un pénible rejet; elle n'a jamais vraiment compris cette décision. Notre principale erreur a été de ne pas avoir contacté ses parents afin de les associer à une démarche de responsabilisation auprès de leur fille. Sous prétexte que Lucie était une adulte, nous avons laissé traîner les choses.

Lucie revient parfois nous voir et elle en est toujours au même point: à 23 ans, elle est toujours sans travail, elle traîne encore au centre commercial et elle poursuit ses études, cette fois à l'éducation des adultes. Elle n'a toujours pas d'argent, pas de travail ni de projet pour se motiver dans sa vie d'adulte.

Marcel

Marcel est un exemple à l'opposé de Lucie. Il est déficient léger, il le sait et l'assume. Il a travaillé périodiquement dans un atelier protégé depuis qu'il a terminé sa scolarité. Il s'exprime difficilement, parle parfois tout seul, manque de concentration. Il écrit en très grosses lettres carrées, mais est très fier de savoir se débrouiller en calcul. Il est resté deux ans à la Boîte à lettres. Pendant cette période, il a appris à conduire un «scooter», s'est trouvé un emploi et une «blonde». Il est revenu à quelques occasions à la Boîte à lettres avec sa «blonde», déficiente elle aussi. Ils vivent en appartement, font leurs repas, travaillent, s'occupent de leur budget. Les parents sont disponibles, mais généralement le couple se débrouille sans eux.

Marcel ne sait peut-être pas encore lire et écrire (peut-être ne le saura-t-il jamais), mais son passage à la Boîte à lettres l'a beaucoup aidé en lui faisant rencontrer des jeunes non déficients qui l'ont encouragé à devenir autonome et à communiquer. Le plus important pour Marcel demeure l'aide et l'encouragement de ses parents. Sa mère a toujours maintenu un contact avec nous et elle cherchait des emplois qui convenaient aux possibilités de Marcel et qui pourraient lui permettre d'être autonome.

Les cas de Lucie et de Marcel: la différence, peut-être, entre un milieu indifférent et un milieu motivant, la différence entre l'avenir d'un gars déficient et celui d'une fille déficiente.

Richard

Richard est un gars de 18 ans enjoué et débrouillard. Il est le dernier d'une famille de huit enfants. Il a fait son primaire dans les classes ordinaires avec quelques difficultés et a été orienté dans les classes spéciales au début du secondaire. Il a abandonné l'école en troisième secondaire. Depuis, il fait des «jobines» pour des membres de sa famille. Maintenant il veut terminer son secondaire et apprendre un métier. Sa motivation semble bonne et ses acquis relativement élevés; il comprend le contenu de ce qu'il lit et il écrit au son. Au premier cours il s'est bien intégré, il parlait beaucoup et il aidait les plus lents. C'était stimulant. Mais après le premier cours il n'est jamais revenu. J'ai appelé chez lui deux semaines plus tard; sa mère m'a finalement avoué qu'il avait eu l'impression de se retrouver avec des «fous» comme au secondaire, et qu'il ne pouvait plus supporter ça... J'étais furieuse de penser que Richard abandonnait, alors qu'il avait des chances de réussir, parce que l'atmosphère de la Boîte à lettres lui rappelait trop celle des classes spéciales.

Ginette

Ginette est une habituée de la Boîte à lettres; elle vient et revient depuis trois ans. Elle a 24 ans, deux enfants maintenant. C'est une fille grasse, enjouée, qui vit avec son «chum» depuis longtemps. Sa mère est analphabète et suit des cours à l'éducation des adultes; c'est par son entremise que Ginette a connu la Boîte à lettres. Ginette a un problème d'élocution à cause duquel elle a été envoyée dans les classes spéciales dès la première année. Son enfant de cinq ans manifeste des retards de langage, mais cela ne semble pas être considéré comme un problème par Ginette et par sa famille. D'ailleurs, elle est très susceptible dans son rôle de mère, surtout devant les conseils venant de célibataires.

Ginette fait des stages de travail (chez les Jeunes récupérateurs, à Longueuil) et a trouvé un emploi dans une usine de couture de Montréal. Elle gagne 150 $ par semaine, pour 40 heures de travail debout, à peine quelques dollars de plus que son allocation d'assistance sociale. Elle a encore

bien de la difficulté à lire et écrire, mais elle est plus assurée, plus intégrée socialement. Son couple tient, son mari travaille, son milieu l'appuie. Peut-être aura-t-elle plus d'outils pour aider son enfant à l'école si jamais il est envoyé en «classe de maturation». Espérons que nous serons encore un appui pour elle. Sinon, ce sera encore un exemple d'analphabétisme se reproduisant de génération en génération.

2. Commentaires et essai de généralisation

L'influence du milieu, d'hier à aujourd'hui

L'analphabétisme, loin d'être un problème individuel, est un problème de société, de pauvreté et de faible scolarité. C'est un phénomène qui a tendance à se perpétuer de génération en génération et qui est devenu visible après l'instauration de la scolarité obligatoire. Avant 1948, les milieux pauvres n'avaient pas accès à l'école. L'analphabétisme était courant et normal. Maintenant que le savoir est accessible, et même obligatoire pour tous, il est inquiétant de constater que, malgré les efforts de démocratisation scolaire entrepris depuis la fin des années 1960, les milieux pauvres «passent» souvent à travers l'école sans y acquérir les rudiments nécessaires à la vie adulte dans une société scolarisée et industrialisée.

Les parents des jeunes analphabètes sont souvent eux-mêmes peu scolarisés. Ils ne peuvent aider leur enfant car ils sont vite dépassés par les nouvelles méthodes pédagogiques et par toutes les exigences de l'école. La valeur qu'ils accordent à l'école est théorique, puisqu'ils se sont débrouillés dans la vie sans l'avoir fréquentée. Les enfants ne peuvent apprendre la joie ou l'intérêt de la lecture s'il n'y a pas de livres à la maison et si leurs parents n'écrivent ou ne lisent jamais. Ils sont conscients de cette indifférence et ils sont plus sensibles aux comportements de leurs parents qu'aux beaux principes énoncés par ceux-ci.

André est un bon exemple d'indifférence par rapport à l'école; il était le dernier d'une famille de dix enfants et ses parents n'ont jamais voulu l'envoyer à l'école pour le protéger contre la drogue et la violence. André était analphabète complet à 21 ans.

Les familles défavorisées sont, encore aujourd'hui, des familles nombreuses; il n'est pas rare d'y compter sept, huit ou neuf enfants. Le nombre d'enfants peut influencer la quantité et la qualité de l'attention que chacun reçoit. C'est un critère de réussite déterminant quand on sait l'importance de l'aide des parents pendant les premières années du primaire. Il n'est donc pas rare de voir plusieurs enfants d'une même famille éprouver des difficultés scolaires. La grosseur des familles pauvres peut aussi entraîner des situations d'instabilité: déménagements fréquents en raison des augmentations de loyer ou des changements d'emploi des parents. Certains

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enfants peuvent être placés temporairement en foyer d'accueil après un accident de travail, une dépression, un divorce. Ces changements ont des conséquences négatives sur le cheminement scolaire et souvent les difficultés d'apprentissage débutent au moment de ces bouleversements. Citons comme exemple Stéphane, placé pour deux ans en famille d'accueil après l'accident de travail de son père, lequel est demeuré un an dans le coma, et qui se demande naïvement si cela a nui à son apprentissage. Stéphane, qui n'a jamais fait plus d'un an dans la même école primaire!

Si le milieu social détermine parfois l'échec scolaire, il détermine aussi l'analphabétisme chez les jeunes adultes. L'environnement du jeune de 20 ans n'a pas tellement changé par rapport à celui dans lequel il évoluait à 6 ans. Il faut travailler à partir de cette constatation.

Le cheminement scolaire

Les jeunes analphabètes ne sont pas des décrocheurs dans le sens où ce mot est employé généralement. Les décrocheurs sont des jeunes qui ont abandonné l'école avant la fin du secondaire, où ils étaient dans les classes ordinaires, et qui peuvent reprendre leurs études là où ils les avaient laissées dans les écoles nouvellement mises à leur disposition (qu'on appelle les «écoles de décrocheurs»).

Les jeunes analphabètes ne viennent pas des classes ordinaires. Ils ont passé la majeure partie de leur scolarité dans les classes spéciales. Ils peuvent avoir terminé leur scolarité, sans pour autant en avoir obtenu un résultat satisfaisant, que ce soit pour les connaissances de base en français ou en mathématiques ou pour l'apprentissage d'un métier. Leur cheminement scolaire peut se résumer comme suit: les classes spéciales dès les premières années du primaire jusqu'en deuxième secondaire, ensuite le choix de faire le professionnel court, qui offre les rudiments d'un métier, parfois complètement anachronique (tissage, pour les filles), ou encore de faire une ou deux années de stages non rémunérés en milieu de travail. Cette scolarité est finale et ne donne pas de diplôme. Le jeune qui abandonne le professionnel court à 13 ans n'est pas plus perdant que celui qui y reste jusqu'à 17 ou 18 ans.

La seule issue pour le jeune qui veut continuer sa formation est de reprendre le primaire en alphabétisation, et de refaire étape après étape tout ce qui vient à peine de se terminer sur un échec... Belle perspective.

Les problèmes «d'apprentissage»

Il est difficile de déterminer les causes et les conséquences des lacunes actuelles des jeunes analphabètes. Est-ce parce que les classes spéciales étaient turbulentes qu'ils ont si peu de concentration? Est-ce parce qu'ils étaient distraits et lunatiques qu'on les a mis en classe spéciale? Bien

difficile à dire! Ce qui est évident, c'est que ces enfants viennent pour la plupart d'un milieu sous-scolarisé et défavorisé et que les problèmes qu'ils éprouvaient peut-être à six ans, non seulement ne se sont pas résorbés, mais se sont maintenus ou amplifiés.

Les problèmes des jeunes sont multiples. Les jeunes analphabètes ont une peur terrible de l'échec, qu'ils ont connu durant toute leur scolarité. Ils se sentent incapables et idiots. La direction, les autres enfants, les professeurs, tous leur ont renvoyé une image négative d'eux-mêmes. Certains s'y sont identifiés ouvertement, d'autres l'ont contestée et se sont cachés sous une carapace de dur ou de délinquant.

Les jeunes analphabètes n'ont pas acquis d'habitudes de travail et d'exigences envers eux-mêmes, car on n'a généralement exigé d'eux que le minimum. Ils ont constamment été dans des classes pour «déficients», «solitaires», «mésadaptés socio-affectifs», élèves ayant des «troubles graves ou légers d'apprentissage», etc. S'ils ne savent pas trop qui ils sont, ils se sentent par contre très anormaux. Leur scolarité a été linéaire et morne. Rien ne changeait vraiment dans le programme au fil des années. Il n'y avait pas de progression logique vers la sixième année et la fin de l'école primaire. Ils y ont perdu la notion fragile du temps et cela a limité leur développement psychologique ainsi que la formulation d'objectifs à long terme. Ils n'ont pas connu les ambitions légitimes des enfants quant à leur avenir, ils n'ont pas eu d'objectifs d'amélioration de leurs performances scolaires, ils n'ont pas connu la fierté d'être enfin les plus vieux de l'école et les plus responsables.

Ils n'ont pas acquis le programme du primaire, que ce soit en français, en mathématiques, en sciences humaines, en sciences de la nature ou en géographie. Ils n'ont pas acquis le sens des mesures: ils ont de la difficulté à évaluer une distance, un poids, une longueur. Tout pour eux prend des proportions exagérées et irréalistes: ils ont perdu 30 livres en une semaine, il y a 2 ans qu'ils travaillent (quand il y a en réalité 6 mois), ils arrivent une heure d'avance à un rendez-vous «pour ne pas être en retard».

En fait, ils n'ont souvent pas atteint la capacité d'abstraction nécessaire à l'élaboration de concepts. L'information qu'ils reçoivent de l'extérieur est peu organisée: ils savent mal y distinguer l'essentiel du secondaire, faire des liens entre les idées, déduire, en résumer le sens. Ils ont de la difficulté à se concentrer, à mémoriser, à utiliser la logique dans la résolution de problèmes. Ce qui n'est pas rattaché à leur réalité immédiate a peu de sens pour eux; ils ont de la difficulté à généraliser à partir d'un exemple fictif.

De plus, ils sont très passifs devant l'apprentissage. Ils veulent apprendre à lire, mais sans effort, en attendant que le travail de l'enseignant fasse «son effet». La plupart n'ont pas eu de projets stimulants à

l'école. Ils ont appris à ne rien faire, à remplir des feuilles, à copier sans but, sans fin. Mais ils n'ont pas, ou si peu, appris à formuler des objectifs, bâtir un projet et trouver des moyens de le réaliser. N'étant pas pris au sérieux, ils n'avaient souvent pas de responsabilités à assumer, pas de valorisation dans les travaux qu'ils faisaient. Pour eux, la classe n'était qu'un mauvais moment à passer. Et pour ceux qui ont eu la chance d'avoir des enseignants motivants et dynamiques, les résultats se sont plutôt fait sentir par une joyeuse atmosphère de bonheur et d'épanouissement personnel, au détriment d'un apprentissage rigoureux du français et des mathématiques. D'ailleurs, c'est aussi ce qui guette notre travail d'alphabétisation, car il est beaucoup plus facile de constater des progrès dans le domaine social que dans le domaine cognitif.

Devant l'échec presque permanent, les jeunes analphabètes ont créé des mécanismes afin de camoufler leurs difficultés; ils ont appris à copier et à faire semblant. Ils ont appris à se valoriser devant leurs camarades en étant le «pire», le pire trouble-fête, le moins bon. Ceux qui prétendaient réussir étaient mis à l'écart et jalousés. Au sortir de l'école, ils ont perpétué cette attitude de fuite. Ils ont appris à se fier à leur entourage pour combler leurs lacunes en lecture et en écriture, et cette attitude de dépendance et de contournement est si ancrée qu'elle devient un handicap lorsqu'ils veulent maintenant apprendre.

Intolérance et rejet

À l'occasion de la fête de l'Halloween, plusieurs jeunes discutent dans la cuisine du local, sur fond de musique tonitruante et devant des bières. Le thème de la discussion: l'atmosphère au local. D'anciens participants qui ont collaboré à la vidéo parlent beaucoup. Leurs réflexions sont que la Boîte à lettres a changé, que les plus intéressants sont partis parce qu'on perdait son temps, qu'on n'apprenait rien et qu'il y avait trop de débiles. Tout le monde écoute attentivement, même ceux qui sont qualifiés de «débiles». J'assiste à la discussion sans savoir comment intervenir. Les jugements des jeunes sont parfois si aléatoires! Certains jeunes jugés normaux ont clairement un handicap intellectuel, alors que d'autres sont isolés simplement parce qu'ils sont différents par leur apparence physique ou leur tenue vestimentaire. Les critères d'évaluation des jeunes sont très personnels et dépendent beaucoup de leurs souvenirs scolaires. Ceux qui critiquent le plus ne sont pas nécessairement les plus motivés à entreprendre l'alphabétisation.

Les jeunes rejettent avec mépris le milieu dans lequel ils ont vécu leur scolarité, même s'ils participent encore au «niaisage» qu'ils dénoncent. Le milieu des classes spéciales est en même temps leur hantise et leur sécurité; ils ne connaissent rien d'autre. Ils préfèrent, sans vraiment choisir, être les premiers parmi les «poqués» que de risquer d'être les derniers parmi les «normaux». Toute personne d'allure le moindrement anormale les

met devant leur passé. Ils n'ont pas la confiance requise pour se démarquer et définir leur propre personnalité. Leur intolérance est grande et se manifeste par des blagues, des rejets et des départs fréquents de l'organisme en raison de la présence de «débiles».

Comme animateurs, nous sommes pris entre deux feux: favoriser la compréhension et le respect, tout en acceptant l'agressivité des jeunes, qui doivent regagner confiance en eux. Ils ont si peur d'être déficients qu'il est difficile de leur demander d'être tolérants envers la déficience. De même, il est délicat de leur faire prendre conscience de leur comportement de «niaisage», quand ils ne connaissent rien d'autre, et surtout pas la valorisation par la réussite des apprentissages.

La communication

Beaucoup de jeunes analphabètes ne s'expriment pas facilement. Ils se répètent, parlent par onomatopées, par gestes et sans employer les mots justes. La conversation de groupe est un défi, chacun établissant son discours en dehors de celui des autres. L'animateur devient le carrefour de huit monologues, c'est exigeant et non profitable. L'apprentissage du dialogue et de l'écoute est un processus long qui se développera de pair avec une meilleure conscience de soi et des autres.

Le point culminant de la non-communication a été atteint lorsqu'un groupe d'analphabètes belges est venu nous rendre visite. C'était une vraie tour de Babel, alors que nous parlions tous français! Le vocabulaire et les expressions des jeunes, autant belges que québécois, étaient trop limités pour qu'ils puissent se comprendre. Les animateurs sont devenus des interprètes, pour parler d'une réalité identique, de sentiments très proches et d'échecs scolaires semblables. Nous nous sommes rendu compte que la littérature et le savoir nous permettaient d'accéder à la connaissance d'une langue internationale, qui dépassait le temps et les régionalismes.

À l'opposé, les jeunes analphabètes utilisent la langue de façon limitée et locale. Leur communication se nourrit de l'oral, des émissions populaires de la télévision et de la radio. Aucune locution ou aucun vocabulaire propre à l'écrit n'y trouve place. Le français de Bernard Derome* constitue du chinois pour eux au même titre que le français de France ou de la Communauté française de Belgique.

Par chance, la soirée avec les Belges a été une réussite. Les jeunes ont senti leurs points communs plus qu'ils ne les ont verbalisés. On a beaucoup ri de ces barrières linguistiques, et c'est en faisant la vaisselle après le repas que l'on s'est finalement rejoints.

* Présentateur-animateur des nouvelles télévisées.

Les relations amoureuses

Beaucoup de couples se sont formés grâce à la Boîte à lettres. Nous avons assisté à plusieurs tentatives ainsi qu'à la création de quelques couples stables. Plusieurs jeunes ressentent douloureusement la solitude et leur objectif principal est de trouver un partenaire. Cela peut, nous l'avons constaté, devenir une bonne motivation pour assister aux ateliers. Comme ce sont souvent pour ces jeunes les premières expériences amoureuses sérieuses, il y a des problèmes d'insécurité, de jalousie et d'exclusivité. Un couple formé dans mon atelier m'a rendu la tâche délicate parce que je devenais une menace pour la fille chaque fois que je m'adressais au garçon.

Le contexte de la Boîte à lettres facilite les échanges et les rend plus sécurisants, puisque les jeunes n'ont pas besoin de provoquer les rencontres. Nous sommes parfois devenus malgré nous des interprètes: les jeunes venaient nous expliquer leurs désirs, leurs frustrations, incapables de s'adresser directement à la personne intéressée. Nous devions faire passer le message.

Les jeunes qui ont réussi à établir un couple stable sont partis rapidement de l'organisme. On peut penser qu'ils voulaient oublier au plus vite le contexte de leur rencontre, puisque c'était pour eux le rappel d'un échec antérieur commun. Ils sont donc partis sans que l'objectif d'apprentissage ait été atteint. Leur motivation principale devenait l'organisation matérielle de l'amour: l'appartement commun, l'argent à mettre de côté, les projets d'avenir, le mariage souhaité, etc. L'apprentissage de la lecture allait rejoindre d'autres bonnes intentions, jusqu'à ce que le besoin en redevienne pressant. Nous sommes loin d'offrir un service primordial et essentiel... et nous le constatons chaque fois qu'il est question d'amour ou d'un nouvel emploi.

La situation des filles

Les filles de 20 ans sont moins nombreuses à suivre des cours d'alphabétisation, comme elles étaient généralement moins nombreuses dans les classes d'adaptation scolaire au primaire. En raison de leur éducation, les filles sont souvent plus dociles et se conforment plus facilement aux exigences de l'école, ce qui leur assure de meilleures chances de réussite au cours primaire. Le retard des filles se voit plutôt au secondaire, en sciences et en mathématiques notamment. Les filles se dirigent encore maintenant vers des emplois traditionnels, moins valorisants et moins rémunérés que ceux des garçons. Cela est aussi vrai, sinon davantage, pour les filles qui sont en adaptation scolaire. Au deuxième secondaire, au professionnel court, le choix pour les filles se limite généralement au tissage, à la cuisine et à la couture. Autant dire qu'elles n'apprennent que les tâches domestiques courantes et non la base d'un métier. Le choix pour les garçons est un peu plus intéressant, quoique peu varié: ébénisterie, débosselage, reliure et mécanique.

Quant aux stages en milieu de travail, ils offrent aux filles un prolongement de leur situation de femme et de mère: garder des enfants dans une garderie, travailler dans une cafétéria ou une manufacture de couture. L'accès au marché du travail est très restreint.

Les filles analphabètes sont plus dépendantes que les garçons, étant généralement responsables des enfants. Elles ont le goût d'avoir des enfants car c'est un critère de réussite sociale. Elles peuvent enfin «produire quelque chose de beau», aussi bien que n'importe quelle fille scolarisée. Si la maternité constitue une nouvelle motivation pour apprendre, elle peut aussi entraîner un plus grand isolement ou un appauvrissement. Advenant une séparation, la fille se retrouve souvent seule avec la charge de l'enfant. Les garderies étant chères, il est difficile pour ces mères d'envisager un retour aux études ou au travail. Cela demande une énergie et une motivation énormes, surtout quand on est analphabète.

Les filles analphabètes ayant un partenaire alphabétisé vivent souvent une double dépendance: la dépendance financière et celle de ne pas savoir lire. Cela les laisse peu sûres d'elles et les confine dans un rôle traditionnel. Elles doivent compter sur l'argent du conjoint et sur ses compétences en lecture. Elles peuvent difficilement envisager une séparation, car elles ont peu de ressources propres.

Quant à la situation contraire, elle est souvent beaucoup plus équilibrée: la dépendance mutuelle consacre l'égalité. Le conjoint analphabète apporte sa force de travail, la sécurité financière, mais il a besoin des compétences de sa femme afin de lire les factures, régler les comptes, remplir des formulaires. La femme est plus respectée, car elle contribue au couple en apportant ses compétences. L'homme, qui a un emploi, est quand même plus valorisé socialement, le travail étant plus reconnu que la capacité de lire. Nous avons connu plusieurs garçons analphabètes qui vivaient cette situation d'interdépendance dans le couple. En général, cela donnait des couples assez égalitaires et plus stables.

Il faut accorder une importance particulière aux filles dans notre recrutement, les aider à surmonter leur manque de confiance, les encourager à aller au bout de leurs capacités, les aider concrètement à trouver des gardiennes pour leurs enfants, à sortir de chez elles, à trouver un emploi.

Les attentes par rapport à l'alphabétisation

Les jeunes viennent à la Boîte à lettres pour une raison bien précise: l'insistance d'un nouveau partenaire, un temps mort entre deux emplois, la demande d'un agent d'aide sociale, la naissance d'un enfant, etc. Ils veulent lire et écrire, mais ils veulent surtout être autonomes (par rapport à leurs parents, à leur famille), avoir «une job, un chum ou une

blonde». Le besoin de lire et d'écrire est associé à la normalité; c'est vague et imprécis. Ils veulent obtenir la mention «normal», comme s'ils portaient une étiquette, mais en même temps ils ont toujours pu se débrouiller sans savoir lire et écrire. Ils savent mal comment intégrer ce nouveau bagage dans leur vie.

Les jeunes veulent surtout apprendre à lire pour des raisons pratiques, c'est-à-dire pour lire les journaux le matin dans l'autobus, lire les lettres qu'ils reçoivent, remplir eux-mêmes les formulaires. Certains veulent obtenir un diplôme, mais ils sont peu nombreux. La lecture est pour tous une dure nécessité qui n'a rien à voir avec le plaisir, la détente, le besoin de connaissances. Ils ne vivent pas dans des milieux où les livres et revues sont très présents, et leur curiosité intellectuelle s'en ressent.

Quand ils viennent à la Boîte à lettres, les jeunes cherchent aussi souvent un milieu de vie, un lieu où ils seront traités en égaux, où ils seront respectés en tant qu'adultes. S'ils cherchent une écoute, ils veulent surtout être pris au sérieux. Pour la plupart, ces attentes ont été largement comblées: la Boîte à lettres est devenu un point de repère, un lieu de socialisation, stable et amical. Le seul fait que nous existions, que nous représentions un autre type d'école, une autre image des «profs» semble parfois suffisant. Les jeunes en tirent une assurance et une confiance dont ils profitent même s'ils viennent seulement de temps à autre.

Nous pouvons résumer comme suit les attentes formulées par les jeunes: apprendre à lire et à écrire, avoir un emploi, former un couple, avoir des amis. Paradoxalement, notre rôle est de répondre à la première attente, mais c'est par rapport aux autres que nous obtenons le plus de succès, surtout en ce qui a trait à la formation d'un milieu de vie. Lire et écrire demeure l'objectif le plus vague et le plus difficile à atteindre.

LE GROUPE POPULAIRE D'ALPHABÉTISATION

1. Faire connaître l'organisme

La sensibilisation

La sensibilisation est la tâche qui consiste à informer le milieu et à le conscientiser par rapport à l'analphabétisme. Le milieu, ce peut être la population en général, les animateurs des groupes communautaires et les responsables des organismes publics, les enseignants des écoles primaires ou secondaires, etc. Il faut faire connaître une réalité, expliquer ses manifestations et ses causes, diffuser largement les possibilités de solutions, si modestes soient-elles. Une action à portée sociale doit se répercuter dans une réflexion articulée afin d'atteindre un vaste public.

Pour la Boîte à lettres, cet objectif a été un souci constant. Nous avons publié deux rapports de recherche que nous avons diffusés à toutes les occasions possibles. Nous avons produit une vidéo que nous avons animée devant des publics divers. Nous avons produit un journal à partir de textes écrits par les jeunes. Nous avons rarement refusé des entrevues. Tout cela nous a permis de devenir un interlocuteur valable, ainsi qu'en témoignent les diverses invitations que nous avons reçues, dont celle de représenter le Canada à l'Unesco, en 1986, à une conférence sur l'analphabétisme chez les jeunes.

La sensibilisation du milieu est une des responsabilités premières des organismes populaires. De mon expérience, je retiendrais trois réflexions concernant la sensibilisation:

La sensibilisation ne doit pas supplanter l'action.

À une certaine période, nous avons eu l'impression à la Boîte à lettres que notre meilleur travail était la sensibilisation et non le travail auprès des jeunes. En deux ans d'existence, nous n'avons pas cessé de parler de notre travail. Pourtant, le travail auprès des jeunes est le fondement de tout le reste. Il peut être dangereux de devenir des experts d'une question: on peut perdre peu à peu le contact avec la réalité qui, elle, évolue sans cesse. Il faut mentionner que le fait que nous ayons été les seuls à nous spécialiser dans l'alphabétisation des jeunes nous a propulsés sur le devant de la scène et a exigé de nous une présence constante.

La tâche de sensibilisation peut constituer un danger pour les jeunes qui l'assument.

À la Boîte à lettres, nous avons toujours fait participer les jeunes à cette tâche, puisque c'est de leur réalité qu'il s'agit. Leurs citations ont nourri la première recherche, leurs témoignages constituent l'essentiel de la vidéo, et plusieurs entrevues dans les médias ont été faites avec leur collaboration. Toutefois, il est inquiétant de constater que ces jeunes, qui hier n'intéressaient personne, deviennent captivants parce qu'ils sont analphabètes! La presse est avide de ces réalités qu'elle peut dénoncer. Les journalistes cherchent les pires cas, dénonçant le système scolaire, ou veulent émouvoir le public par les «success stories» de gens qui ont vaincu leur analphabétisme.

Nous avons été mêlés malgré-nous à cet engouement soudain, sans toujours en mesurer les conséquences. Devant cet intérêt, les jeunes réagissaient en finissant par dire ce qu'on attendait d'eux. Avec étonnement, nous les entendions dire qu'ils n'avaient jamais rien appris à l'école et que, depuis qu'ils étaient à la Boîte à lettres, leur vie avait radicalement changé. Ce qui était loin d'être le cas! Les jeunes devenaient les jouets naïfs des médias. Pour eux qui ont de la difficulté à mesurer le temps, cette soudaine

révision de leur vie n'était pas des plus profitables. Je me rappelle très bien l'indignation d'Alain devant sa photo étalée en pleine page du journal *La Presse*, sous des citations travesties de ce qu'il avait dit en toute confiance.

Il faut donc être très prudent quant au rôle que les jeunes peuvent jouer dans la sensibilisation, afin que ceux-ci en retirent quelque chose de valorisant et de positif. Ils ne sont pas des animaux de zoo que l'on doit promener pour satisfaire la curiosité des amateurs de scandales.

Il ne faut surtout pas confondre la sensibilisation et le recrutement.

La sensibilisation peut avoir un certain effet sur le recrutement, mais cet effet est incertain, indirect. Le recrutement est une tout autre tâche, bien plus concrète et exigeante, qui fait appel aux qualités de l'animateur et non à celles de l'intellectuel qui explique et réfléchit.

Le recrutement

Le recrutement est une opération essentielle au fonctionnement d'un service comme le nôtre. Notre défi est de taille, car les personnes analphabètes ne sont pas faciles à atteindre. D'une part, plusieurs d'entre elles ne voient pas comme un problème ce que la société considère comme tel. D'autre part, les personnes analphabètes ne font généralement pas appel aux ressources publiques ou communautaires. Elles se débrouillent comme elles peuvent, en comptant surtout sur l'aide de leur entourage immédiat. Ceux qui veulent apprendre à lire vivent souvent leur analphabétisme comme une tare qu'il faut cacher.

Les jeunes vivent une situation qui rend le recrutement encore plus difficile. Ils viennent à peine de quitter l'école et ils ont le goût de connaître autre chose: trouver un emploi, se débrouiller, «vivre leur vie». Ils font une croix momentanément sur l'apprentissage «scolaire» et tentent de réussir dans d'autres domaines. Nous offrons un service nécessaire, mais difficile à «vendre», en particulier aux intéressés. Notre tâche consiste à faire savoir aux jeunes qu'il existe des ressources pour eux et qu'ils pourront les utiliser quand ils en sentiront la nécessité. Moins il y a d'intermédiaires entre les jeunes et nous, meilleur est le recrutement.

Les moyens connus de recrutement sont les articles dans le journal régional, un dépliant simple et attirant, les tournées des organismes communautaires et publics pour laisser des affiches, des dépliants et rencontrer les responsables. Longtemps nous avons utilisé ces moyens, mais ils n'ont pas rapporté tous les résultats escomptés. Après quatre ans, la Boîte à lettres est connue comme étant une ressource fiable et sérieuse. Par contre, le nombre de participants n'a pas beaucoup augmenté, se maintenant entre 20 et 25 jeunes pour le territoire de Longueuil et des environs.

Pourquoi le recrutement stagnait-il? Il est facile de se sentir coupable et de s'imaginer que les jeunes ne sont pas satisfaits de ce qu'on leur offre. Pourtant, nous ne sommes pas responsables du fait que l'alphabétisation n'est pas un besoin essentiel au même titre que se nourrir, s'habiller et se loger. Nous ne sommes pas responsables du fait que l'alphabétisation est une démarche longue et exigeante qui met les gens devant leurs échecs antérieurs et dont les résultats sont loin d'être garantis. Mais il me semble aussi que notre travail de recrutement était fait de manière timide et limitée.

Par notre action, nous pouvons avoir une influence dans les milieux où l'on risque de connaître l'analphabétisme. Nous devons être animateurs en dehors du local, avant le commencement de la démarche d'alphabétisation. Et c'est ce qui est le plus exigeant. La tâche n'est pas facile à planifier, elle doit se faire sur le tas, en utilisant toutes les occasions propices.

Le recrutement constitue une tâche cruciale qui implique une continuité, des objectifs, un plan d'action et la désignation de responsables. Cette tâche s'apparente à celle d'un travailleur «de rue»: elle signifie SORTIR de l'organisme, aller distribuer des dépliants et parler avec les gens dans le métro, à la sortie des banques tous les premiers du mois quand sont envoyées les allocations d'aide sociale, dans les centres commerciaux, dans les maisons de jeunes, etc. Dans ces occasions, on revoit souvent les mêmes personnes, on apprend à connaître les problèmes quotidiens, on devient peu à peu une figure connue. On apprend où les jeunes se regroupent, qui sont les personnes-ressources et les leaders du milieu. Ce travail «de rue» peut nous fournir énormément d'information sur les jeunes analphabètes, les décrocheurs, les sans-emploi. Il peut nous permettre de savoir quelles sont leurs préoccupations et leurs réticences à l'égard de l'alphabétisation.

L'accueil dans l'organisme consolide le premier travail de recrutement. Il importe que ce travail se fasse de façon continue et non seulement en septembre et janvier. Le roulement étant assez élevé, les jeunes intéressés doivent bénéficier du service dès qu'il y a une place libre. L'efficacité de l'accueil et l'impression positive de la première entrevue constituent des éléments qui détermineront si les jeunes continueront la démarche. Pour une personne qui accepte de suivre les cours, il faut compter au moins cinq entrevues qui n'apporteront pas de résultat.

Les listes d'attente sont, dans la mesure du possible, à éviter. La première entrevue doit avoir lieu rapidement, même s'il n'y a pas de place disponible. Cette rencontre permet de vérifier si l'organisme correspond aux besoins de la personne ou s'il faut la diriger ailleurs. L'entrevue constitue un engagement supplémentaire pour la personne analphabète, une occasion de se familiariser avec les lieux et les gens qui fréquentent l'organisme.

À la Boîte à lettres, les premières entrevues duraient de une heure à deux heures et demie, on prenait le temps nécessaire, car l'entrevue est un moment très révélateur. Il n'y avait pas de responsable des entrevues, nous en faisions chacun à tour de rôle. Cela nous permettait d'être en contact de façon continuelle avec les jeunes au lieu d'être confiné à l'animation d'ateliers.

On fait l'entrevue seul avec le jeune: les personnes qui l'accompagnent prennent un café avec un autre animateur à la cuisine. L'entrevue se fait à partir d'une série de questions sur le cheminement scolaire, la situation familiale, les expériences de travail, l'explication que le jeune donne de ses difficultés et de ses objectifs d'apprentissage. Nous utilisons un test comportant trois niveaux de difficulté en français et en mathématiques. De plus, nous posons des questions sur les connaissances générales et la géographie. Pendant l'entrevue, nous évitons de prendre des notes afin de ne pas intimider le jeune. La transcription des renseignements obtenus sera très utile pour faire des portraits fidèles des jeunes qui sont venus nous voir et pour améliorer notre travail auprès d'eux.

Nous essayons de fournir une réponse au plus tard trois ou quatre jours après l'entrevue. S'il n'y a aucune place disponible, nous essayons de rappeler fréquemment le jeune pour l'inviter à une fête, une soirée d'information, bref lui rappeler que nous tenons à lui et que nous voulons qu'il continue la démarche.

2. L'équipe

Deux conditions sont essentielles pour faire partie d'un groupe populaire d'alphabétisation: une expérience ou une formation en enseignement, si possible au primaire, et une expérience ou des capacités en animation. Il n'est pas facile d'être à la fois enseignant et animateur. Nous avons oscillé constamment entre ces deux pôles. Parfois nous avons délaissé la pédagogie pour ne vivre que les soupers, les rencontres, l'animation avec les jeunes. Nous étions ravis de l'esprit de groupe et de l'affluence au local, mais les progrès en français n'étaient pas concluants. Nous avons voulu par la suite privilégier le contenu pédagogique. Nous nous sommes enfermés dans nos bureaux pour préparer du matériel extraordinaire... mais nous n'avions plus le temps de parler aux jeunes! Là comme ailleurs, il faut chercher l'équilibre et se réévaluer constamment.

De «bons profs»

La Boîte à lettres a été conçue par quatre étudiants diplômés du baccalauréat en enseignement en adaptation scolaire. Bien que l'équipe ait subi de nombreuses transformations depuis les débuts et que dans les équipes d'alphabétisation on ait souvent des expériences très diversifiées, je demeure

convaincue que l'expérience en enseignement constitue un atout majeur pour la formation d'une équipe, puisque notre mandat est de montrer la lecture et l'écriture. La formation en orthopédagogie a donné un caractère particulier à la Boîte à lettres; nous avions reçu une formation pour enseigner à ces jeunes six ans plus tôt. Nous avions connu par nos stages scolaires les classes spéciales et vu les qualités qu'il fallait pour y enseigner. Nous connaissions les méthodes de lecture, les programmes scolaires, les contenus pédagogiques du primaire.

Notre formation nous a permis d'être plus proches de l'école primaire et secondaire, d'y avoir certaines entrées et de comprendre ce qui s'y passe réellement. L'absence de liens entre les enseignants qui sont au primaire et au secondaire et ceux qui travaillent à l'éducation des adultes, surtout dans les groupes populaires, constitue un problème sérieux. Il y a un mur de méfiance et de méconnaissance qui sépare les secteurs, ce qui morcèle la tâche d'enseignement et nuit à la vision d'ensemble de la formation. Il nous est arrivé si souvent de rencontrer des enseignants du primaire qui ne se sentaient pas intéressés par l'alphabétisation, alors que les problèmes d'apprentissage débutent dès le primaire et vont en s'aggravant!

Nous avons rencontré des enseignants de classes spéciales du primaire dans le but de connaître leurs méthodes pédagogiques et leur matériel. Notre formation en orthopédagogie nous a rendus plus exigeants quant à la pédagogie. Nous ne voulions pas recréer, à l'image de certaines classes spéciales, une ambiance spontanée d'animation et de contacts chaleureux dans laquelle l'apprentissage de la lecture prendrait la dernière place. Nous voulions offrir un programme qui soit le plus structuré possible, permettre aux jeunes de s'évaluer graduellement, exiger le meilleur d'eux-mêmes, ce qui était la base de notre foi en leurs capacités.

Ressourcement en pédagogie

Le travail d'alphabétisation est contraignant et exigeant. Nous avons besoin continuellement de renouveler nos approches, d'évaluer nos actions, de préciser nos objectifs, de chercher du matériel adéquat. Il ne s'agit pas de réinventer la roue: des recherches éducatives ont déjà été faites, et le matériel destiné aux enfants des milieux défavorisés, les mesures d'évaluation formative, les méthodes d'apprentissage de la lecture méritent d'être étudiés soigneusement. Il s'agit d'en tirer ce qui est utile et de l'adapter.

En 1984, la pédagogie n'était qu'un des sujets abordés dans nos réunions, où l'on parlait aussi de financement, de fonctionnement interne, etc. Ces réunions étaient trop fréquentes (une par semaine) et trop lourdes pour être efficaces. En 1987, nous avons organisé des réunions d'équipe mensuelles consacrées uniquement à la pédagogie, préparées et animées

par une personne responsable du dossier, au cours desquelles nous avions le temps de discuter d'un thème et de l'approfondir en fonction de notre pratique. Nous avons aussi eu recours à des personnes-ressources du milieu de l'enseignement. Nous avons rencontré d'autres équipes d'alphabétisation afin d'échanger sur nos pratiques communes: évaluation des apprentissages, stratégies à adopter quant aux mathématiques, questionnement sur les échecs, élaboration d'un projet pédagogique.

Le plus important pour l'équipe, qu'importe le genre de ressourcement, c'est de ne pas se refermer sur elle-même, d'admettre franchement ses problèmes et ses faiblesses, de définir ses besoins de formation et d'aller chercher les ressources là où elles sont.

De bons animateurs

Il ne suffit pas d'être un «bon prof» pour travailler dans un groupe d'alphabétisation. Il faut se considérer aussi comme un animateur et vouloir agir au-delà du pédagogique, dans la vie même des jeunes. Souvent, c'est par la cohérence et la qualité de notre action que nous établissons le lien avec les jeunes et fournissons l'appui qui leur permet de poursuivre cette formation si lente et difficile. Si nous n'offrons pas cet appui, les jeunes abandonnent plus facilement et ne reviennent pas nous faire part de leurs problèmes ou de leurs réussites.

Les jeunes viennent chercher auprès de nous un appui global. Ils ne morcèlent pas leurs besoins. S'ils viennent de vivre une séparation de couple, de quitter un emploi, ils ne pourront être disponibles à l'apprentissage. Leur univers est sensible à tout bouleversement. L'occasion se présentera souvent d'abandonner des cours difficiles et peu valorisants. Nous devons donc tenir compte de tous ces facteurs de motivation et de démotivation. Pour eux, qui viennent passer de six à dix heures au local, l'organisme constitue un point de repère.

Être animateur, cela peut signifier bien des choses, insignifiantes aussi bien que fondamentales. Aller manger chez Michel et son amie pour les aider dans leur décision concernant la poursuite d'une grossesse. Prendre un café avec André, parce qu'il songe à se suicider. Rester parfois une heure après le cours parce que les jeunes ont simplement le goût de parler. Aider Line qui veut quitter son «chum» et en même temps régler son problème de drogue. Trouver des activités pour Robert, qui s'ennuie. Souper, un soir sur deux, avec des jeunes qui arrivent une heure avant le cours. Et quoi encore!

Il est évident qu'il ne faut pas se prendre pour Dieu le Père (ou Mère Teresa, selon le cas) et vouloir régler tous les problèmes. Nous sommes d'abord et avant tout un groupe qui se consacre à l'alphabétisation et

les jeunes doivent le savoir clairement. Mais il faut être attentif, accepter de les écouter et de discuter, pour ensuite les diriger vers les bonnes ressources. Il ne faut surtout pas laisser les jeunes isolés avec leurs problèmes.

Ressourcement en animation

Le premier ressourcement est l'équipe elle-même, qui constitue un lieu d'échange et d'aide mutuelle. Un animateur ne doit pas porter seul le poids de son action; toute l'équipe doit l'appuyer. La cohérence de l'équipe sera alors ressentie par les jeunes et sera un facteur positif pour maintenir une ambiance sereine. Il faut apprendre aussi à se ménager; l'équipe peut établir une rotation pour les moments de disponibilité auprès des jeunes.

Par la suite, le ressourcement peut venir de différentes sources; l'important c'est qu'il nous permette de voir le jeune dans son ensemble et non comme une personne analphabète. Le Bureau de consultation jeunesse (BCJ) est une bonne ressource: il offre une série d'ateliers et de conférences portant sur les jeunes et le travail, la drogue, l'école, la sexualité. Les centres locaux de services communautaires (CLSC)* peuvent aussi offrir des ateliers intéressants sur la santé des jeunes, la sexualité. Les personnes qui travaillent à prévenir le décrochage scolaire peuvent apporter un éclairage utile, tout comme les groupes populaires qui s'occupent d'hébergement, de prostitution, etc.

J'ai en mémoire une rencontre de quelques dizaines d'organismes populaires travaillant auprès des jeunes un peu partout à travers le Québec. Nous avions été réunis par des organisations religieuses afin de discuter des priorités des jeunes. Ces journées d'échange avaient été très fructueuses et nous avaient permis de resituer l'alphabétisation dans l'ensemble des besoins des jeunes.

3. Le milieu de vie

D'abord l'atmosphère d'un souper: le « 5 à 7 » avant les cours (souvenir de l'automne 1986).

> *Johanne finit de faire en vitesse ses photocopies; elle veut avoir le temps d'aller dehors avant que la tornade ne commence. Le téléphone sonne; c'est Julie qui prend dix minutes à expliquer qu'elle arrivera un*

* Les centres locaux de services communautaires ont entre autres mandats la prévention en matière de santé et l'organisation de services communautaires.

peu en retard. André entre comme d'habitude le premier à cinq heures. Il va s'acheter un repas au restaurant d'en bas. En début du mois, c'est le repas du jour; à la fin, c'est seulement un frite... mais il dit alors qu'il n'a pas faim.

Soudain on entend la radio; ça doit être Claude qui vient d'arriver. De son pas traînant, il va prendre un Coke à la cuisine (il faudrait lui demander s'il le paye parfois!). Ensuite, il ira se rasseoir au salon sans enlever sa veste de cuir, même s'il fait chaud à mourir. Ginette entre et s'installe en riant dans la cuisine. Elle prend sans doute un répit dans ses tâches de mère en arrivant tôt. Moi je dois acheter du fromage, j'y cours et croise trois personnes qui montent. Bientôt nous sommes douze dans la petite cuisine. Six sont assis, essaient de manger, alors que les autres sont debout, coincés entre les chaises et les armoires. Le salon est vide. Carole est peut-être arrivée; comme elle est timide, elle doit être en train d'étudier dans la salle de son atelier. Ça crie à la cuisine; Denis mange dans les assiettes des jeunes. Tout le monde aime ça dans le fond, à part moi bien sûr!

J'ai mal à la tête; j'essaie de penser à mon cours, mais deux personnes me parlent en même temps. Il faudrait que je leur fasse comprendre une fois pour toutes que je ne suis pas un magnétophone! Et je suis préoccupée par Jean-Pierre qui n'a pas donné de nouvelles depuis deux semaines...

Il y a une discussion dans le corridor qui bloque la circulation; Denis parle avec Lucien au sujet d'articles affichés sur le babillard. Johanne profite de l'affluence dans la cuisine et d'un silence miraculeux pour rappeler l'ordre du jour de la prochaine assemblée générale et inviter tout le monde à y être.

On fait la vaisselle, en attrapant deux gars au hasard, pour montrer l'exemple. Denis s'est déjà esquivé parce qu'il doit faire le texte de lecture pour son atelier, et comme il est six heures et demie... Claude accapare le téléphone depuis une demi-heure avec son amie; il considère sans doute que c'est plus calme ici que chez lui! Il faudrait que j'aille parler au nouveau, il a l'air isolé dans son coin. Mais Alain y est

allé, bravo. Michelle surveille la porte; Pierre ne l'appelle plus depuis deux semaines et sa seule chance de le voir, c'est ici. Je jurerais que c'est sa plus grande motivation pour venir à la Boîte à lettres en ce moment. C'est le contraire pour Gérard et Manon: depuis qu'ils sont ensemble, on ne les voit plus.

Encore trois minutes et les ateliers commencent. Je finis mon dessert, j'attrape un dernier café en passant. Les jeunes sont déjà installés, à part Pierre qui tient absolument à ce que Denis aille voir «son nouveau char». Vite, il est déjà sept heures!

Pour les jeunes, suivre des cours est extrêmement exigeant. L'atmosphère du groupe et la disponibilité des animateurs sont des facteurs essentiels de motivation. Nous devons créer et animer un «milieu de vie»; cela commence généralement par le choix judicieux d'un local. La Boîte à lettres ayant fait l'expérience de trois locaux, je les décrirai rapidement, pour ensuite résumer les conditions essentielles à la constitution d'un milieu de vie.

Le premier local était un petit trois-pièces commercial situé au deuxième étage d'une pizzeria sur le chemin Chambly. Autour: une fruiterie, un garage, un comptoir à hot dogs et un centre commercial. C'était un quartier où les jeunes vivaient et se sentaient à l'aise. À l'intérieur du local, le décor était affreux, mais nous l'avons laissé ainsi faute d'argent et de temps. Quand on montait l'escalier extérieur, des jeunes étaient assis sur les marches à parler et regarder passer les gens. Ce local était un lieu apprécié des jeunes. Comme il n'y avait pas de place pour s'isoler, on vivait ensemble sans cérémonie et sans peur de salir quoi que ce soit. L'ambiance était très chaleureuse. À cette époque, notre matériel pédagogique était rudimentaire et de mauvaise qualité, mais notre disponibilité était sans limites. Chaque jeune nous fascinait, et l'alphabétisation était un domaine d'apprentissages et de surprises quotidiens. Nous sommes demeurés là un an et demi.

Le deuxième local était très différent, ainsi que nos attentes; nous avions le goût du beau, du propre et du grand. Nous avons aménagé au troisième étage d'un immeuble du vieux Longueuil. Ce local était de six pièces avec plancher de bois franc. Une merveille! Nous l'avons décoré et nous avons acheté du matériel de bureau. Les jeunes n'ont pas beaucoup apprécié ce local ni l'atmosphère qui y régnait. Tout était trop fonctionnel, trop défini quant à l'utilisation. Parfois la porte de notre bureau était fermée parce que l'un de nous voulait travailler en paix. Les jeunes se sentaient de trop en dehors des heures de cours et ils ne se reconnaissaient pas dans le quartier chic de Longueuil. De plus, l'escalier interne qui menait au troisième donnait au local l'allure d'un bureau. Après deux ans, nous avons redéménagé.

Le troisième local, dans lequel je n'ai pas travaillé, semble être une bonne synthèse des deux précédents. La Boîte à lettres est retournée dans le quartier populaire, en haut d'un club vidéo. Autour: un restaurant populaire, un garage, des magasins et la vie du boulevard. L'escalier est à l'extérieur, de grandes vitres nous font voir l'intersection des rues commerciales. Le local est visible et facilement accessible. Toutes les pièces donnent sur une grande cuisine.

Je retiendrais ces quelques réflexions sur la recherche d'un bon «milieu de vie».

On ne peut pas choisir un local au détriment du quartier.

Même si les pièces correspondent à nos besoins et que le transport en commun rend le local facilement accessible, il est inutile de s'installer dans une rue secondaire, où il n'y a pas d'endroit pour prendre un café, pour magasiner, etc. Il faut éviter à tout prix de s'installer dans les quartiers où les jeunes ne vont jamais.

Les jeunes préfèrent avoir accès directement au local par l'extérieur.

Les jeunes aiment s'asseoir dans les marches de l'escalier ou sur le balcon; ils voient venir les gens. De plus, une porte qui donne directement sur l'extérieur a l'avantage de ne pas donner l'impression d'entrer dans la salle d'attente d'un bureau, où il ne faut pas faire de bruit et attendre son tour. Le local doit ressembler plus à une maison qu'à un bureau.

Chercher un équilibre entre les goûts des jeunes et ceux des animateurs.

Les jeunes pourraient avoir une pièce pour bavarder sans déranger, regarder la télévision ou écouter de la musique. Cet endroit n'est pas facile à organiser en pratique. Les jeunes ne viennent pas quotidiennement comme nous, ils n'ont pas d'idées communes pour la décoration, et souvent c'est notre compagnie qu'ils recherchent. Mais il est possible de permettre aux jeunes d'avoir un mot à dire dans l'aménagement, la décoration et l'utilisation des pièces.

Un local, même adéquat et dans un bon quartier, ne vaut rien s'il n'est pas accessible en dehors des heures de cours.

Les jeunes doivent sentir qu'ils ne dérangent pas quand ils viennent au local et que le local est aussi à eux. Pour cela, il faut un horaire fixe et déterminé pour assurer une permanence. Nous étions ouvert du lundi au jeudi, de 14 heures à 22 heures. Le vendredi était consacré aux réunions ou aux congés, et les matins au travail personnel des animateurs.

Mais un milieu de vie se crée d'abord par la disponibilité et la présence des animateurs. Les échanges doivent être multiples, spontanés, et ne pas être trop encadrés (« D'accord, tu veux me parler, que dirais-tu de mercredi prochain à deux heures et demie? »). La disponibilité, c'est quitter sa tâche pour consacrer une demi-heure ou plus à bavarder avec un jeune. C'est accepter que pendant l'heure précédant les cours, il y ait du bruit, des rires, la télé et la radio, et des allées et venues continuelles. La disponibilité se vit spontanément; les rencontres importantes se font souvent au bout d'une table, pendant la vaisselle ou en prenant un café. Cela n'élimine en rien la nécessité de prendre parfois des rendez-vous, d'être plus rigoureux dans les entrevues; mais la disponibilité spontanée doit constituer la toile de fond de la communication avec les jeunes.

Un lieu propice à l'apprentissage de la lecture sous toutes ses formes.

L'apprentissage de la lecture doit déborder le cadre des cours et faire peu à peu partie de la vie des jeunes. C'est pourquoi nous avons constitué, avec la collaboration de la Bibliothèque de la ville de Longueuil, une bibliothèque contenant une centaine de livres neufs, attrayants et faciles à lire: des bandes dessinées, des livres pour les enfants des participants, des légendes, de courts romans, des livres de vulgarisation sur la science, la santé, les phénomènes naturels, etc. Les livres sont placés en évidence: on essaie d'en encourager la lecture en les présentant dans les cours et en organisant un système de prêt personnel. Ce n'est pas encore un service très utilisé, mais le livre fait partie du paysage visuel. Nous achetons aussi des revues susceptibles d'intéresser les jeunes; nous les laissons traîner dans les ateliers, à la cuisine et dans les toilettes. De plus, il faut afficher beaucoup afin d'habituer les jeunes à observer les messages écrits et à s'interroger sur leur contenu. Il y a donc un espace aux toilettes pour les graffiti (que nous remplissons nous-mêmes consciencieusement), des babillards où sont affichées des photos des derniers partys, des découpures de journaux, une bande dessinée humoristique, etc. Les ordres du jour des assemblées générales sont placardés dès l'entrée en vue d'attirer l'œil (nous soignons beaucoup la présentation visuelle de nos pancartes). Pour terminer le tout, il y a des calendriers où sont inscrites les dates des fêtes et des événements importants, ainsi que des affiches de toutes sortes. Le local « expose » sa raison d'être et renouvelle sans cesse le message dans le but de garder intacte la curiosité.

Idéalement, j'aurais aimé que le local soit aussi un lieu pour travailler de manière individuelle et autonome entre les ateliers. Les jeunes pourraient avoir accès à du matériel préparé d'avance sous forme de fiches de travail graduées et autocorrectrices ou de disquettes d'exercices pour travailler avec l'ordinateur. Les jeunes auraient ainsi une chance d'acquérir des habitudes de travail en se responsabilisant par rapport à leurs objectifs d'apprentissage. Nous serions disponibles, mais les jeunes pourraient très bien s'organiser seuls. C'est un projet dont nous avons souvent parlé mais qui n'est pas devenu réalité.

LE GROUPE POPULAIRE DANS SON MILIEU

1. Connaître son milieu

Le groupe populaire s'inscrit dans un milieu qui possède son histoire, ses caractéristiques propres en ce qui a trait à la population, à l'économie, à l'habitation, à l'éducation. S'inscrire dans un milieu, c'est prendre le parti de le connaître sous tous ses aspects. Connaître une ville, un quartier, c'est découvrir, à travers des lectures, des rencontres et des promenades, l'histoire de la ville, les taux de délinquance, de suicides, d'abandons scolaires, les loisirs, les luttes populaires, les déplacements de population. Ce n'est pas chose facile, le travail quotidien étant déjà si prenant qu'on risque d'oublier de faire cette recherche sur le milieu.

La Boîte à lettres est située à Longueuil, ville voisine de Montréal, qui ne possède évidemment pas les mêmes services et infrastructures que la métropole. Longueuil est un «gros village» qui a subi un développement urbain des plus désordonnés. Côte à côte se trouvent des centres commerciaux gigantesques, d'anciens chalets de campagne, des tours à bureaux, des appartements à loyer modique. La ville n'est pas divisée en quartiers comme l'est Montréal; les paroisses sont encore très actives en ce qui a trait aux loisirs des jeunes et des gens âgés. Longueuil possède deux CLSC, trois centres Travail-Québec ainsi que trois écoles secondaires dans un rayon de quatre kilomètres carrés. À cela s'ajoutent deux bibliothèques, un collège, une seule station de métro, grand lieu de rendez-vous, puisque c'est aussi le terminus de tous les trajets d'autobus de la Rive-Sud.

D'après le recensement de 1981, on dénombre 125 000 résidents, dont 22 p. 100 ont entre 15 et 25 ans. Les groupes populaires sont assez bien représentés: presque tous ceux qui y travaillent se connaissent, de près ou de loin. La ville offre une aide à ces groupes, ainsi que la possibilité d'utiliser des locaux et des services d'imprimerie, mais sa priorité demeure l'organisation des sports pour les jeunes. Les communications entre groupes populaires ainsi qu'avec les organismes publics sont plus faciles dans une ville comme Longueuil, que dans la lourdeur bureaucratique et l'anonymat de Montréal. Mais malgré quatre ans de travail dans cette ville, ma connaissance du milieu est encore faible et elle se résume surtout aux groupes populaires et aux organismes publics qui ont des liens avec les jeunes.

La connaissance du milieu est nécessaire si l'on considère les jeunes analphabètes comme des êtres à part entière ayant de multiples besoins, celui de savoir lire et écrire n'étant qu'un besoin parmi d'autres. Comme la plupart des jeunes de leur âge, les jeunes analphabètes sont très préoccupés par le fait de trouver un emploi; c'est pour eux la condition minimale de l'entrée réelle dans le monde des adultes et d'une certaine autonomie financière. Les jeunes veulent aussi quitter la maison familiale, trouver un logement, établir une relation amoureuse. Autant que celle du couple,

l'idée d'avoir un foyer à eux procure une sensation de réelle liberté à l'égard des parents. Cela ne veut pas dire que les projets tiennent le coup très longtemps, mais ils demeurent une priorité dans l'esprit de ces jeunes.

Pour certains, d'autres problèmes sont plus urgents: régler une séparation difficile, se sortir de la drogue, trouver un appartement après un séjour en maison d'hébergement, faire face à des problèmes psychiatriques. Et même s'ils étaient analphabètes, plusieurs ne sont restés que le temps d'une entrevue et sont repartis dans leur monde sans que nous ayons pu vraiment les aider. Au moins nous savions qu'ils connaissaient notre organisme et pouvaient y revenir.

Nous devons donc nous concevoir comme l'un des maillons d'une chaîne de coopération reliant les organismes qui répondent aux besoins des jeunes. La connaissance mutuelle des services et l'orientation rapide et directe sont indispensables.

2. Les groupes communautaires

Nos alliés les plus proches pour répondre aux besoins des jeunes demeurent les autres groupes communautaires. Nous partageons avec eux des objectifs similaires, une structure souple et des revendications communes. Il n'est pas faux de dire qu'au départ, chaque groupe se considère comme étant le plus important. Il y a risque d'entrer en compétition pour obtenir les subventions et attirer la «clientèle». Cette attitude ne sert aucunement le travail que nous faisons. Au contraire, c'est l'ouverture d'esprit et la franchise qui doivent être développées si l'on veut apprendre des autres et mieux connaître notre milieu.

Nous pouvons établir nos alliances communautaires selon deux axes: selon l'axe horizontal, soit avec ceux qui font de l'alphabétisation populaire, et selon l'axe vertical, soit avec ceux qui travaillent auprès des jeunes.

Les ressources jeunesse

Les organismes de Longueuil avec lesquels nous entretenons des liens sont: le Bureau de consultation jeunesse, la Maison des jeunes, l'Entretemps (hébergement à court et moyen terme), les Jeunes récupérateurs (programme d'emploi), le SEMO* (avant qu'il ne disparaisse en 1986), la Jeunesse ouvrière catholique (JOC). Nous travaillons souvent auprès des mêmes jeunes, pour des raisons différentes.

* Service externe de main-d'œuvre: service lié, surtout par le financement, au Service de placement et de main-d'œuvre du Canada.

La Boîte à lettres a été membre d'une table de concertation jeunesse à Longueuil pendant plusieurs années. Cette coalition voulait définir une série de revendications pour les jeunes, offrir de l'aide aux groupes, établir une plus grande coordination à l'égard des pouvoirs municipaux, provinciaux et fédéraux. Cette participation nous a apporté beaucoup. Nous avons appris à connaître notre milieu, ses ressources, ses projets. Nous nous sommes engagés pour défendre les autres groupes quand il était question de fermeture de services, de la diminution d'une subvention ou d'ingérence extérieure. C'est ensemble que nous avons pu élaborer une position commune sur les services à mettre sur pied à Longueuil pour répondre aux besoins des jeunes et sur l'aide que nous attendions de la municipalité et des organismes publics.

De notre côté, nous avons expliqué l'analphabétisme, phénomène peu connu des animateurs des groupes jeunesse, qui en soupçonnaient toutefois souvent l'existence. Nous avons partagé nos expériences concernant les filières de l'adaptation scolaire, les voies souvent sans débouchés que sont le professionnel court et les stages en milieu de travail. Grâce à notre travail, les groupes jeunesse se préoccupent davantage du volet éducation de leur projet et le défendent auprès des pouvoirs publics intéressés.

Depuis plusieurs années, nous avons des liens étroits avec l'organisme Les Jeunes récupérateurs. Cette entreprise embauche des jeunes pour la collecte et le tri du papier. Les jeunes sont formés à l'emploi et à la prise de responsabilités. L'objectif est de leur donner une expérience positive de quatre à six mois de travail et de faciliter leur insertion sur le marché du travail. Plusieurs de nos jeunes ont fait un stage aux Jeunes récupérateurs. Nous avions un suivi, puisqu'ils continuaient leur cours le soir et que l'entreprise en tenait compte dans son horaire de travail. Nous communiquions fréquemment avec les animateurs afin de suivre les progrès et parler des difficultés. Pour plusieurs jeunes, cette expérience aura permis de trouver un emploi stable.

Les collaborations dans l'orientation entre groupes jeunesse ne se font pas de façon bureaucratique. Nous connaissons les personnes qui travaillent dans les organismes et nous savons que les jeunes seront reçus rapidement et sans cérémonie. Pour préserver un lien harmonieux, la communication avec les groupes doit être entretenue continuellement. On ne peut pas se fier aux réputations, bonnes ou mauvaises. Il faut voir sur place, connaître et se faire connaître, car les structures sont souples et le roulement de personnel assez élevé. La Boîte à lettres invite les divers organismes dans ses locaux environ une fois par année. C'est l'occasion de discuter, de montrer notre matériel de travail et la vidéo, de présenter les nouveaux membres de l'équipe. Cette connaissance mutuelle aidera les animateurs lorsqu'il faudra adresser les jeunes au bon endroit.

Le Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec

Depuis sa fondation, la Boîte à lettres fait partie du Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec (RGPAQ). Nous avons pris part à toutes les assemblées, nous avons participé à des comités de travail ainsi qu'au comité de coordination. Le Regroupement est pour nous primordial. Il n'existe pas simplement pour nous permettre de revendiquer de meilleures subventions. L'alphabétisation est une préoccupation sociale de plus en plus répandue dans différents secteurs de la population. Il est urgent de consolider les solutions de rechange au système scolaire traditionnel. Il n'y a pas qu'une voie d'accès au savoir et les organisations non gouvernementales le prouvent en organisant la formation à une échelle plus petite, selon les besoins des différentes populations qu'elles servent.

L'éducation populaire est continuellement menacée d'extinction ou de récupération. Au Québec, le gouvernement a dépensé 25 millions de dollars en 1989 pour l'alphabétisation. Les groupes populaires n'en recevaient que 2 millions, budget qui est gelé d'année en année.

Nous devons constituer un mouvement national pour assurer la survie de l'éducation populaire. Grâce au Regroupement, nous mettons en commun des réflexions et des analyses fondées sur nos expériences respectives. Nous élargissons notre vision de l'alphabétisation grâce aux groupes qui travaillent en milieu urbain et rural, avec des populations cibles. Chaque groupe contribue à enrichir la vision d'ensemble.

Depuis sa fondation, le RGPAQ a contribué à poser le problème sur les plans politique et social, de façon à éveiller l'opinion publique ainsi que les autorités politiques. Si nous sommes reconnus comme un partenaire essentiel sur le plan national comme sur le plan international (Unesco et Conseil international de l'éducation des adultes), le RGPAQ et les groupes qui en sont membres n'en retirent que peu de bénéfices financiers.

3. Les partenaires «non organisés»

L'entourage immédiat des personnes analphabètes

Nos partenaires dans le travail d'alphabétisation sont d'abord les personnes qui connaissent les jeunes. La collaboration que nous souhaitons ne doit pas être perçue comme une ingérence paternaliste ni comme la conclusion que les jeunes ne peuvent se prendre en main. Le milieu immédiat englobe les parents, les partenaires, les amis, les frères et sœurs des jeunes qui fréquentent l'organisme. Leur attitude peut influencer beaucoup le comportement des jeunes à l'égard de l'apprentissage.

Certains proches vivent la démarche d'alphabétisation du jeune dans un sentiment d'indifférence et de mépris. Ils ne posent jamais de questions, n'offrent aucune aide concrète à l'apprentissage. Ils ont déjà adopté le jugement de l'école et classé le jeune parmi les « incapables ». Ce mépris accable le jeune et le laisse complètement démuni comme au temps de la « petite école ».

Dans certains cas, par ailleurs, les proches sont trop protecteurs; ils vont écrire les lettres, régler les factures, lire le courrier, conduire le jeune partout où il doit aller. Même si l'intention est louable, cette attitude favorise la passivité et engendre un manque de confiance et d'initiative devant les démarches à entreprendre. L'aide constante des proches est étouffante. La personne analphabète se sent impuissante, passive, et s'habituera progressivement à cette prise en charge sécurisante.

Par contre, les proches savent parfois aider: ils reconnaissent la situation d'analphabétisme et s'informent des progrès, tout en apportant une aide adéquate. Ils encouragent constamment le jeune dans ses démarches, sans pour cela les faire à sa place. D'abord et avant tout, ces proches aiment la personne comme elle est et la considère comme **normale**. C'est le fondement de toute interaction que nous devons rechercher avec l'entourage. Sinon, le milieu de vie du jeune restera un obstacle à l'alphabétisation.

Souvent les gens de l'entourage ne savent pas comment s'y prendre pour donner de l'aide. Ils n'ont pas une vision claire de la démarche à suivre, accordent une importance énorme à des apprentissages superflus ou inadéquats. Le groupe populaire doit associer les proches à la démarche d'alphabétisation afin de leur faire jouer un rôle constructif dans l'apprentissage.

Cela peut se faire en invitant les gens à assister à un cours ou aux soirées de fin de session, lorsqu'on présente le résultat du travail. Les jeunes ont l'occasion de montrer leurs travaux et d'expliquer leurs objectifs d'apprentissage. Des rencontres spéciales peuvent être organisées sur notre démarche de travail, sur l'analphabétisme en général, afin d'aider les gens à voir le problème de façon globale.

Ce travail rend possible une collaboration que l'école ne réussit pas toujours à obtenir: se rapprocher du milieu de vie, permettre que les expériences circulent de part et d'autre. Car si l'organisme a des choses à transmettre, cela est aussi vrai pour l'entourage. Cet éclairage mutuel sera très profitable pour comprendre les blocages de certains jeunes et la façon dont ils vivent à l'extérieur de ce lieu limité qu'est l'organisme d'alphabétisation.

À la Boîte à lettres, nous avons entrepris ce travail sans lui donner une forme structurée ni d'objectifs précis. Nous avons invité l'entourage aux fêtes de Noël et aux soirées de fin d'année. Nous avons fait aussi des

soirées «portes ouvertes» au début et à la fin des sessions. Nous avions peur de paraître paternalistes en allant chercher les parents. Pourtant, nous avons pu constater que les jeunes sont contents de nous faire connaître leur entourage. Ils sont satisfaits aussi d'avoir accès librement à leur lieu de formation, de montrer les travaux qu'ils font, les livres ou les textes qu'ils lisent, le projet collectif en cours. Plus les liens sont étroits et constants entre l'extérieur et l'intérieur, plus le transfert de connaissances a des chances de s'effectuer.

Les personnes-ressources du milieu

Ceux qui peuvent être nos alliés ne sont pas tous organisés dans des réseaux collectifs. Certains groupes ou individus sont des partenaires essentiels parce qu'ils travaillent depuis longtemps dans leur quartier, qu'ils y sont connus et respectés et qu'ils connaissent les besoins des gens. Ce peut être le responsable du comptoir de vêtements d'occasion installé dans le sous-sol d'une église, le curé d'une paroisse, le propriétaire du dépanneur du coin, un gérant de caisse populaire. Ces personnes travaillent isolément et souvent dans l'ombre. Il faut se faire connaître d'elles de façon directe. Elles ont une expérience précieuse. Il faut leur parler de ce que nous faisons, les inviter à venir visiter le local, les inciter à nous envoyer les jeunes qu'elles côtoient et dont elles connaissent les lacunes. Ce contact contribuera à une meilleure insertion dans le milieu et permettra d'établir des réseaux multiples d'orientation dans le travail de recrutement.

4. Les organismes publics

Les établissements scolaires

Nous sommes en contact avec trois secteurs de l'éducation publique: le primaire, l'éducation des adultes, secteur de l'alphabétisation, et l'école des décrocheurs. Avec les écoles primaires, nous avons des rapports épisodiques et spontanés, qui sont surtout dus à l'initiative d'enseignants intéressés par notre pratique. Nous aimerions pouvoir rencontrer de manière plus régulière les équipes des écoles primaires, mais cela n'a pas encore été fait. Pourtant, c'est à cette étape que se détermine l'échec ou la réussite scolaire.

Avec le secteur de l'alphabétisation de la Commission scolaire de Chambly, nous avons toujours entretenu des liens. En 1984, les budgets des commissions scolaires du Québec étaient plus restreints et nous avons pu en profiter pour contacter les jeunes qui étaient sur sa liste d'attente. La collaboration s'est modifiée lorsque les budgets de l'alphabétisation dans les commissions scolaires ont augmenté, alors que ceux des groupes populaires stagnaient. Cette situation inégalitaire a toujours donné à nos rapports avec la commission scolaire une tournure délicate. Comment établir

un rapport respectueux des compétences mutuelles quand un des deux partenaires est sous-financé, menacé dans son avenir même? Comment discuter d'égal à égal avec un organisme qui gère une équipe de 4 personnes et donne un service à 25 jeunes, et une commission scolaire qui dispense des cours à plus de 400 personnes et administre un personnel d'une cinquantaine de travailleurs?

La reconnaissance de l'éducation populaire se fait sur le plan politique. Les commissions scolaires ne sont pas les «ennemis», même si elles sont manifestement privilégiées à nos dépens. Ce ne sont pas elles qui pourront modifier la situation, mais un changement d'orientation politique dans le développement de l'alphabétisation à long terme. Comme disait le représentant d'une commission scolaire pendant une réunion régionale: «Les groupes populaires ont une liberté et beaucoup de latitude pour déterminer leur travail, mais ils n'ont pas d'argent. Nous, c'est le contraire; on a l'argent mais on est enseveli sous les paperasses administratives et on a peu de marge de manœuvre.»

La collaboration avec la Commission scolaire de Chambly a été lente; il fallait vaincre les méfiances mutuelles. Comme nous étions convaincus de l'importance de notre travail, qui ne remplaçait pas l'école mais constituait un service différent, nous avons fait connaître clairement nos orientations. Cela a permis d'instaurer un climat franc et ouvert. Il n'empêche que toute collaboration est surtout une question de contact personnel. Notre ouverture et celle de la directrice du secteur de l'alphabétisation ont été déterminantes pour créer un rapport positif.

Les relations avec l'école de décrocheurs ont toujours été faibles et discontinues. Nous avons tenté des rapprochements, car nous voulions connaître les objectifs du programme de première année du secondaire afin de bien diriger les jeunes. Mais la méfiance est forte; les dirigeants de l'école de décrocheurs de Longueuil se sont sentis attaqués par notre travail et nos interventions publiques. Et comme plusieurs jeunes ont parlé sans détour de leurs expériences négatives dans les classes spéciales de cette école secondaire, cela a nui à nos rapports. Même si l'idée n'était pas de désigner un responsable de l'analphabétisme chez les jeunes, cela a été interprété dans ce sens. Les susceptibilités sont très grandes au secondaire quand il est question d'analphabétisme.

Mises sur pied à titre expérimental il y a quelques années, les écoles de décrocheurs ont essaimé partout au Québec. Elles ont comme mandat principal de permettre aux jeunes qui ont abandonné leurs études secondaires de les terminer. À ce titre, elles font partie de l'enseignement primaire et secondaire, même si elles reçoivent surtout des adultes. Ce rattachement des écoles de décrocheurs à l'enseignement primaire et secondaire a comme conséquence de les éloigner de l'enseignement aux adultes. Souvent ces deux structures existent côte à côte sans se connaître et offre des

programmes similaires. Il y a dédoublement des services et les jeunes sont parfois ballottés entre les deux avant de trouver la ressource adéquate.

Les jeunes analphabètes ne sont rarement des candidats pour les écoles de décrocheurs. Leurs besoins d'apprentissage se situent au niveau du primaire, même s'ils ont parfois en main un «diplôme» de professionnel court. L'organisation des cours dans les écoles de décrocheurs s'apparente souvent à celle des collèges. Chacun va à son rythme et doit être autonome dans sa démarche d'apprentissage. Les classes spéciales ne sont pas des expériences très concluantes pour initier les jeunes à une telle façon de travailler.

Les écoles de décrocheurs n'alphabétisent pas; cela ne fait pas partie des mandats du secondaire. Mais elles font face elles aussi à l'échec scolaire; elles commencent à offrir des classes de préalables aux exigences de la première secondaire. Il n'est pas évident que la classe de préalables, tout comme auparavant les classes d'adaptation scolaire du secondaire, conduise au programme ordinaire. Une autre voie d'évitement? Quel sera l'intérêt d'un jeune, qui a passé sa scolarité dans les classes spéciales et qui se retrouve, dans une telle filière, à l'école de décrocheurs? Il est préférable qu'un jeune s'alphabétise et se donne des objectifs réalisables pour fonctionner dans la société plutôt que de perdre son temps dans des classes qui prétendent conduire au secondaire sans jamais y mener vraiment.

La formation générale offerte aux adultes demeure un réseau étanchement cloisonné, véritable labyrinthe pour un jeune qui éprouve des difficultés. Certains se promèneront ainsi plusieurs mois entre l'école de décrocheurs, le recalage en classe de préalables et l'éducation des adultes en alphabétisation. Ce ballottage aura raison de la motivation de certains et en amènera plusieurs autres à végéter dans des classes inadéquates.

Les autres organismes publics

Nous devons rechercher les ressources des organismes publics du milieu: les centres d'emploi fédéraux et provinciaux, les CLSC, les hôpitaux, les ateliers de travail protégé, le Palais de justice. Ces organismes sont en contact avec les jeunes, que ceux-ci le veuillent ou non. Nous devons nous faire connaître d'eux, car ils ne connaissent, pour combler les lacunes de la formation, que l'éducation des adultes ou l'école de décrocheurs. Pour les jeunes, ces solutions seront souvent porteuses d'échec, parce qu'elles leur sont imposées et que la structure scolaire proposée leur rappelle trop leurs échecs antérieurs.

Les organismes publics sont en contact avec beaucoup de monde; leur rayon d'action est large, les services qu'ils offrent sont diversifiés et méconnus. Les CLSC dispensent des cours sur la sexualité, offrent des

cliniques de santé pour les jeunes, des services pour obtenir un avortement, des haltes-garderies, des cours prénataux. Les organismes qui s'occupent de l'emploi pour les handicapés mentaux offrent des services de consultation et d'évaluation. Les centres de main-d'œuvre offrent des programmes de réinsertion destinés aux femmes, etc.

Notre action auprès de ces organismes doit être planifiée et énergique, car ce n'est pas un travail facile. Les organismes publics veulent connaître les groupes populaires en autant que ceux-ci veulent bien se faire connaître d'eux. Les premiers pas doivent toujours venir des groupes populaires. Il faut s'armer de courage, rappeler plusieurs fois, suivre les méandres bureaucratiques, être patient. Le contact est difficile à établir, les équipes de travail sont grosses et on ne sait pas toujours qui est la personne à contacter. Le calendrier de travail semble toujours très chargé et les fonctionnaires ne voient pas nécessairement l'utilité de nous rencontrer pour discuter de l'analphabétisme. Lorsque nous obtenons enfin une rencontre, nous devons nous plier aux contraintes administratives.

CONCLUSION

On ne peut évaluer le travail de la Boîte à lettres uniquement d'après les progrès en alphabétisation, étant donné le caractère difficile et exigeant de ce mandat. Voici donc mes propres critères de réussite pour juger de l'efficacité du travail d'animation qui sous-tend et qui entoure la démarche d'alphabétisation.

— Que les jeunes qui abandonnent la formation sans avoir réussi restent en contact avec l'organisme. S'ils ont pu trouver un emploi, se sentir moins timides, être mieux dans leur peau, cela reflète certainement la qualité de notre travail. Il faut établir **une relation de confiance à long terme** avec les jeunes, afin qu'ils puissent apprivoiser l'alphabétisation et entreprendre la démarche à leur rythme. Des jeunes qui s'en sortent, qui parlent de l'organisme à d'autres, qui viennent nous revoir parce qu'ils se préoccupent des apprentissages scolaires de leur enfant, tout cela constitue des critères de réussite.

— Que l'organisme soit intégré à son milieu social et que ses partenaires continuent de voir en lui une ressource fiable, intègre, permanente. Il faut être connu et reconnu autant par les organismes communautaires que par les marchands, la municipalité, les organismes publics. Cette reconnaissance du milieu demande un travail patient et continu; elle est essentielle pour la survie de l'organisme, surtout face aux compressions budgétaires et aux tentatives de récupération. Notre travail d'animation n'est valable que s'il contribue à tisser **des liens de solidarité dans le milieu**. Et de la même façon, nous ne sommes efficaces comme ressource que si nous connaissons bien le milieu et ses caractéristiques.

— Que l'équipe en place, ainsi que le conseil d'administration qui l'épaule et la supervise, soient en constante évolution. L'alphabétisation est un travail trop délicat pour qu'on le fasse d'une façon routinière et désengagée. La force de l'organisme dépend essentiellement **de l'enthousiasme et de la vitalité de son équipe**. C'est ce qui fait la fragilité des organismes à but non lucratif, dont les budgets ne permettent pas de constituer des équipes stables. Il faut, comme animateur, avoir la franchise et le courage de se remettre en question et de partir si l'on est vidé. Le travail dans un groupe populaire est très exigeant et ingrat; ce n'est pas une raison pour le faire de manière bureaucratique et minimiser les efforts. Sans une équipe décidée à faire de l'animation et à assumer l'innovation en alphabétisation, l'organisme est voué à la disparition.

— Que l'alphabétisation reste le fondement de notre travail d'animation. L'alphabétisation est un domaine relativement nouveau et exigeant. Tout est encore à faire, que ce soit des recherches-actions, l'élaboration d'instruments d'évaluation, l'élaboration des objectifs et des contenus d'apprentissage, la création de textes adaptés aux adultes, l'introduction de l'ordinateur, l'évaluation des acquis, etc. L'alphabétisation doit **se faire dans la recherche et l'expérimentation**, tout en visant les meilleurs résultats possibles.

— Que le travail que nous faisons réussisse à transformer les liens établis dans le réseau des jeunes analphabètes. Que le «chum» ou la mère du jeune adopte de nouveaux comportements à l'égard de la lecture et du jeune, pour que celui-ci se sente à l'aise et pour qu'il puisse adopter de nouvelles attitudes de «lecteur». Notre travail ne peut apporter de résultat que s'il permet de modifier, de bouleverser les rapports antérieurs créés autour de la lecture.

Ces cinq points résument ma façon de voir les stratégies d'animation en alphabétisation dans un groupe populaire. Il n'empêche que je rêve d'une autre façon de concevoir l'alphabétisation. Et, puisque rien n'est impossible, je vous quitte sur ce rêve partagé par notre équipe initiale, composée de Pierre Stanton, Denis Bourgeois et moi-même, au cours de discussions interminables et pleines d'énergie.

Et si l'alphabétisation, c'était...

Autre chose qu'une école nouvelle et améliorée, en fait le contraire de l'école, où l'on fait encore, en vase clos, des cours, des apprentissages, des évaluations, etc.

Je rêve d'un grand immeuble communautaire où logeraient divers groupes populaires. Un objectif commun: aider les jeunes à s'en sortir, dans tous les domaines. Il pourrait y avoir un programme de travail en

débosselage, où les jeunes apprendraient à réparer les voitures, à préparer les estimations et les factures. Il pourrait y avoir un centre de loisirs où les jeunes se retrouveraient pour voir des documents vidéo, organiser une danse, planifier un tournoi sportif. À côté de la bibliothèque, il pourrait y avoir une garderie pour ceux qui viennent au centre; des jeunes pourraient amuser les enfants, supervisés par une équipe expérimentée.

Et naturellement, il pourrait y avoir un groupe d'alphabétisation, intégré à la vraie vie, intégré aux autres besoins des jeunes, de manière simple et concrète, pour les besoins immédiats comme pour les formations à long terme. Certains jeunes pourraient aller uniquement au centre de loisirs pendant deux ans avant d'entreprendre une démarche d'alphabétisation; ils pourraient ainsi en parler avec les animateurs, constater l'utilité de la démarche d'alphabétisation à l'occasion de la confection d'une affiche pour annoncer un film...

Et pourquoi pas un atelier de couture, un bazar permanent de vêtements d'occasion pour les gens du quartier? Et pourquoi pas un organisme qui s'occupe des problèmes de drogue et d'alcool? Il suffit de penser que des groupes accepteraient de partager un espace commun, de se concerter et de s'organiser collectivement, sans perdre leur autonomie et sans devenir une grosse «machine». Il «suffirait» aussi d'avoir assez d'argent pour louer ou (oh! merveille!) acheter ensemble un bâtiment.

Se pourrait-il que l'alphabétisation soit intégrée un jour aux autres préoccupations des jeunes (c'est-à-dire dans un même lieu, avec des équipes qui travaillent en collaboration)? Se pourrait-il que les jeunes puissent en même temps apprendre les bases du travail, de l'engagement, en rendant des services dans le quartier? Se pourrait-il que ce soit cela une école différente, une école de la vie, une école qui correspond aux besoins du milieu? On dit que ce sont les utopies qui nourrissent le quotidien. N'oubliez surtout pas de rêver!

Productions pédagogiques:

Jeune sait pas lire, document vidéo couleur de 39 minutes, réalisé par Roch Christophe Payer, produit par la Boîte à lettres, Longueuil, mai 1985. (Commande: La Boîte à lettres, 112, rue Nobert, Longueuil, Québec, J4J 2Y9; tél.: (514) 646-9273)

La presse à idées, journal de quatre pages présentant des textes écrits par les jeunes, encarté dans l'hebdo régional de la Rive-Sud en mai 1987. (On peut se procurer le journal et un rapport sur l'expérience à la Boîte à lettres.)

Rapports de recherche:

Bourgeois, Denis, et Sylvie Roy, «S'alphabétiser après l'échec scolaire», *ALPHA 86 — Recherches en alphabétisation*, sous la direction de Jean-Paul Hautecœur, Québec, ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1986.

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APPARTENIR À LA MASSE ET MAÎTRISER LA PAROLE: UNE CULTURE ADULTE*

José Luis Corzo
Julio Lancho
Salamanque, Espagne

* Traduit de l'espagnol

LA MAISON-ÉCOLE SANTIAGO UNO DE SALAMANQUE

Tous les jeunes qui arrivent à la Maison-école Santiago Uno de Salamanque, pour y demander une place, savent que ceux qui ont le plus de problèmes l'obtiendront plus aisément que les autres. Aussi se gardent-ils bien d'habitude de cacher leurs problèmes. Sont plus facilement admis ceux qui ont été recalés aux examens que ceux qui y ont été reçus; ceux qui n'ont pas de famille que ceux qui en ont une; ceux qui ne peuvent pas payer que ceux qui ont de l'argent. Au début, certains cas vous font vraiment frémir. Du point de vue scolaire surtout. Bien que tous aient plus de 14 ans, il y en a parmi eux qui n'ont fait que 5 ou 6 années d'école primaire ou qui ont redoublé la sixième. Ce sont de très mauvais lecteurs, qui détestent l'école. Ils sont persuadés d'être des ratés. Certains de leurs compagnons ont pu entreprendre des études secondaires, tandis qu'eux doivent se contenter d'entrer en formation professionnelle, avec l'illusion qu'il n'y est plus tant question d'étudier que d'apprendre un métier. « Il aime bien la campagne, savez-vous, déclare souvent sa mère ou l'adulte qui amène le candidat, mais il n'est pas doué pour les études. Il n'aime pas les livres, voyez-vous. Tout le monde n'a pas les mêmes dispositions. En revanche, regardez sa sœur, qui n'a que six ans: elle est tous les jours plongée dans ses livres et ses cahiers... Mais ce garçon va avec son père conduire le tracteur, traire les vaches, et fait tout ce qu'on lui demande. »

L'éducateur qui accueille le candidat sent dans sa propre chair le défi qu'il faut commencer à relever ce jour-là. Il lui faut introduire ce jeune dans le rythme d'une école à **temps plein** (samedis et dimanches compris, sauf une fois par mois), sans qu'il s'en rende compte. D'une part, le jeune se rendra tous les jours, pendant l'horaire scolaire, à l'École d'agriculture Lorenzo-Milani, où il se peut qu'il suive un cours spécial d'adaptation jusqu'à ce qu'il atteigne le niveau de ses compagnons. D'autre part, à la Maison-école, il fera tous les jours des révisions, pendant les temps libres, avec un camarade volontaire, il fera toutes les semaines maintes activités de groupe et surtout il se consacrera à la lecture du journal, qui sera un instrument miraculeux pour convertir en un élève actif ce jeune abandonné par ses professeurs.

Tous les soirs, après le souper, toute la Maison se réunit pour lire le journal. Le maître-éducateur se met à le feuilleter, avec tout le monde

assis en cercle, grands et petits, éducateurs et cuisiniers, ainsi qu'avec Consuelo, la maîtresse de maison. Ils sont là, tous ensemble, attentifs et prêts à s'informer de ce qui se passe dans le monde. Au premier abord, ils ne témoignent pas d'intérêt pour les nouvelles et n'y prêtent guère attention. Il faut, jour après jour, éveiller leur intérêt et capter leur attention. (Comment s'arrangent donc ces professeurs qui prétendent qu'il faut toujours partir de ce qui intéresse les jeunes?) Pour leur ouvrir l'appétit, nous conseillons de commencer par ce qui est le plus difficile et le plus éloigné pour les jeunes (et non par le football) et de les provoquer. Il conviendrait de pousser plus avant notre réflexion: qui tire parti de l'ignorance des jeunes? Pourquoi les distrait-on tellement? Pourquoi veut-on les maintenir en marge de la société?...

Le maître-éducateur lit un texte et se met à questionner les jeunes, les uns après les autres, pour s'assurer qu'ils ont bien compris. Que veut dire ce mot? Où se trouve ce pays? («Toi, montre-le sur la carte.») Est-ce un pays riche ou pauvre? Qui dirige là-bas? Quelle est l'origine de cet événement? Quelles en sont les conséquences? Que s'est-il passé? Cela nous touche-t-il? Pouvons-nous nous en laver les mains? Le principal truc didactique consiste à stimuler la solidarité. Il ne s'agit pas de diviser le monde en Espagnols et étrangers, en gens proches et éloignés de soi, mais en protagonistes et personnes hors jeu. Il faut faire sentir la proximité des victimes, d'où qu'elles soient et quel que soit l'événement. Il faut tirer le suc de chaque nouvelle, jusqu'à ce qu'on se rende compte qu'elle nous touche nous aussi et en touche d'autres parmi les **nôtres**, aussi loin qu'ils soient. Il convient de la lier à tout ce qu'on peut déjà savoir. On ne doit jamais poser une question à qui en ignore la réponse. Il ne faut interroger le jeune qu'à propos de choses auxquelles nous savons qu'il peut répondre, aussi simples que puissent paraître certaines questions. Celui qui répond s'affirme vis-à-vis de lui-même et des autres, ne fût-ce qu'en citant le prénom du roi ou de son fils. Au cours de cette lecture du journal, bien des jeunes de Santiago Uno ont remporté leurs premiers succès scolaires, voire ont connu leur première et unique satisfaction intellectuelle. Ce qu'ils savaient, ils l'avaient sans doute appris en dehors de l'école, sûrement grâce à la télévision. Y a-t-il donc une meilleure occasion que celle-là pour faire le lien avec la vie et la rue?

Cet exercice, une fois qu'on a commencé à l'utiliser, voit ses résultats se multiplier par mille. Il suffit d'en constater les effets chez les plus anciens: «consultez votre professeur d'histoire», ou «sur cette question d'économie, interrogez votre professeur de mathématiques». «Pose la question à ton grand-père, pour voir s'il s'en souvient»... Il convient que les jeunes notent tous les jours les mots nouveaux qu'ils apprennent et deux ou trois des faits les plus intéressants qu'on leur a racontés. Ces notes leur serviront plus tard de calendrier et de référence.

Sur cette base quotidienne, qui ne dure que de 20 à 30 minutes, on peut construire une foule de choses: d'abord, susciter un intérêt

inépuisable pour tout ce qui arrive aux démunis de ce monde; ensuite, pénétrer avec les adultes dans un monde de sujets plus sérieux et plus variés; et surtout, faire comprendre, jour après jour, que tout ce que racontent les journaux n'est pas vrai, et le prouver. On tirera de tout cela une connaissance détaillée de l'industrie de l'information (propriétaires, agences, publicité, groupes de pression, etc.). Aujourd'hui, cela s'avère une condition indispensable pour conserver la liberté qu'on nous enlève en nous informant mal.

Puis, il y a moyen de suivre de longs événements au cours d'un trimestre, de «démonter» des nouvelles avec soin pour les voir du dedans avec toutes les fausseté et les exagérations, ainsi que de les rédiger nous-mêmes d'après les règles que suivent les journalistes, de manière à ne plus jamais oublier une telle expérience. On pourrait même en arriver à confectionner en huit heures un journal scolaire, tel que *La Bronca* (*La Bagarre*, journal indépendant de Santiago Uno), qu'on publie de temps à autre. Le plus important est le fait que l'on forme ainsi des citoyens informés, critiques et engagés, qui cherchent la vérité.

LES RACINES DE NOTRE EXPÉRIENCE: L'ÉCOLE DE BARBIANA (LORENZO MILANI, 1923-1967)

Cette expérience espagnole d'éducation et d'alphabétisation des adultes, au sens le plus large du terme, trouve son origine dans l'œuvre d'un Italien, Lorenzo Milani, dont les élèves, montagnards de la minuscule paroisse de Barbiana (Florence), ont écrit en 1967 la *Lettre à une maîtresse d'école*. Traduite en espagnol en 1970, cette lettre a fortement influencé les expériences que nous décrivons ici.

Ce texte fut le sommet et la synthèse de l'œuvre de ce prêtre italien, qui mourut quelques semaines plus tard, à l'âge de 44 ans, vaincu par la maladie. Mais ce n'est pas là son seul apport. Aussi devons-nous replacer la *Lettre à une maîtresse d'école* dans son contexte, afin qu'on puisse mieux comprendre notre propre expérience d'éducation en Espagne.

Milani est un double converti. Tout d'abord, en pleine guerre mondiale, alors qu'il avait déjà 20 ans, il s'est converti au catholicisme, auquel il arriva à partir de l'agnosticisme de sa famille (sa mère était juive non pratiquante). Presque en même temps, il s'est «converti» à la solidarité avec les pauvres et les classes sociales défavorisées, dont il s'est rapproché en sortant de son milieu familial fortuné et cultivé.

Sa première conversion l'amena dans la paroisse de Calenzano, située dans la ceinture industrielle de Florence. On sortait à peine de la guerre, du fascisme, de la misère, des traditions arriérées, dans maintes régions, pour se mettre en route vers le progrès et la liberté. Le jeune vicaire

de la paroisse, qui s'était récemment converti à l'Évangile de Jésus-Christ, se trouvait devant ses paroissiens, comme s'il butait contre un mur de préjugés et de conditionnements, fabriqués par la propagande et les modes, sans que la moindre capacité de raisonner leur ait opposé quelque résistance. Milani se rendait compte qu'il était impossible que la Parole vivifiante de sa religion pénétrât en quelque manière dans ces esprits démunis sur le plan de la parole. Or, la parole humaine était le seul véhicule possible pour faire passer sa Parole faite chair. Il a pris alors la décision de consacrer son travail sacerdotal à répandre la culture, principalement chez les jeunes gens, qui étaient la proie de toutes les propagandes, y compris la pire propagande ecclésiastique. Son intuition théologique lui interdisait de concevoir que quelqu'un puisse avoir la foi en la Parole de Dieu sans l'avoir écoutée dans le seul milieu où elle peut être prononcée, soit dans le monde. En outre, Milani entendait bien que chacun, du fond de son cœur, devait dire librement la parole qui désigne la réalité. C'est cela, être adulte : non point apprendre ce que d'autres ont dit, mais appeler soi-même les choses par leur véritable nom. Dans cet écho intérieur, qui utilise les mots de la langue courante pour désigner chaque réalité par le nom qu'elle mérite — et non par celui que d'autres lui imposent —, l'homme reçoit l'appel de la réalité, qui s'adresse à lui seul. Appel et réponse constituent cette rencontre mutuelle, où le réel se voit éclairé par son nom authentique et où le moi de chacun est cité à comparaître dans la cause du réel. On atteint là le point culminant de l'humain. (Pour le croyant, c'est aussi un point de rencontre avec Dieu.)

Il est étonnant de constater combien Milani était proche de Paulo Freire, bien que les deux hommes ne se soient pas connus. Mais la deuxième conversion de Milani, celle en faveur des pauvres, nous fournit la deuxième partie — non moins « freirienne » — de son intention pédagogique : les pauvres sont plus près de la réalité. Les coloniser, leur imposer les noms que nous donnons aux choses, c'est leur faire violence et détruire du même coup les possibilités d'une vraie culture libre, et libératrice de surcroît. C'est que Milani examine d'une manière exhaustive la colonisation des pauvres, qui a été l'œuvre de la culture bourgeoise dominante. Au milieu de l'euphorie déclenchée par la paix mondiale, il pressent tous les risques qui aujourd'hui sont déjà devenus des réalités : l'invasion des médias dans toutes les couches de la société, qui y fabriquent une culture populaire et une information qui, d'habitude, sont tournées vers les intérêts capitalistes ; la destruction de la conscience de classe que cela entraîne et l'éloignement des exploités vers des zones en voie de développement, comme le tiers monde, moins visibles pour nous.

Milani a consacré un livre — le seul qu'il ait écrit sous son nom[1] — à l'étude de l'Église, qui est parfois complice de cette domination des pauvres à travers la culture. Malgré le long prologue signé par un archevêque et l'imprimatur signé par le cardinal de Florence, ce livre a été retiré des librairies, car on le trouvait trop critique.

Mais il devait y avoir encore deux autres chocs avec les institutions civiles de ce monde libre et démocratique: d'une part, avec la magistrature et, surtout, avec le pouvoir législatif aux décisions duquel les juges s'en remettent inexorablement, et, d'autre part, avec l'école. Le premier choc fut provoqué par la défense de l'objection de conscience, que Milani faisait dans son livre, à l'égard du service militaire. Du même coup, il s'en prenait aussi à l'armée et à la patrie en tant que protectrice des intérêts particuliers. Mais, dans l'esprit de ce qui a été exposé plus haut, Milani a clairement expliqué que l'objection de conscience n'était que l'attitude normale du citoyen moderne et qu'elle ne se limitait pas au domaine militaire.

Le texte le plus connu, signé cette fois par ses jeunes élèves de la montagne florentine, fait entrer Milani en conflit avec l'école obligatoire, qui était une véritable entreprise de sélection et de domestication. Cependant, Milani y voit la dernière organisation qui soit capable de cultiver la conscience et la lucidité.

À partir de cette expérience, dont le protagoniste avait dit que **la plus grande infidélité qu'on pouvait commettre à l'égard d'un mort, c'était de lui être fidèle**, on a vu surgir en Espagne un Mouvement d'éducateurs milaniens (MEM), qui fait partie du courant de renouveau pédagogique des dernières années. Ce mouvement conçoit l'éducation comme une prise de position face à la domination et, par conséquent, comme une «désadaptation» plus que comme son contraire: l'intégration dans le monde d'aujourd'hui.

Les techniques didactiques du MEM se contentent de faire prendre conscience de la réalité à partir des intérêts des plus démunis. En même temps, c'est une prise de parole, non moins historique que la prise de la Bastille. Mais, bien sûr, la parole est de plus en plus exposée à l'inefficacité et à la difficulté même qu'on éprouve à l'obtenir. La parole doit mener à l'action, à une attitude personnelle et collective qui jaillira de la prise de position consciente.

Tout ce que nous venons de dire explique, au moins quelque peu, l'énorme méconnaissance du message milanien, sinon le rejet dont il fait l'objet. C'est que Milani place les continuateurs de ses efforts sur le terrain peu propice, et glissant, du paradoxe. Ce «non, mais oui» qui consiste à n'élaborer de théorie pédagogique qu'à partir de la praxis engagée, à s'opposer radicalement aux institutions — depuis l'Église jusqu'à l'école et aux médias, en passant par la magistrature ou le législateur —, tout en respectant rigoureusement l'orthodoxie de chacune d'elles, et à exiger de la culture dominante que les opprimés participent à ses réussites, ne manque pas d'être incommode et choquant dans notre monde où règne l'arrivisme et l'indifférence.

Mais de tous les paradoxes qu'on peut imaginer, celui qui étonne le plus les enseignants de métier, c'est de nouveau l'attitude paradoxale que Milani adopte en ce qui concerne les méthodes. Ce créateur de magnifiques méthodes didactiques, qui par elles-mêmes auraient pu représenter un apport important à la pédagogie, n'accorde aux méthodes qu'une importance fort relative: «Mes amis me demandent souvent, dit-il, comment je fais pour diriger l'école et comment je fais pour qu'elle soit toujours pleine. Ils insistent auprès de moi, pour que j'écrive une méthode, qui leur donne des précisions sur les programmes, les matières et la méthode didactique. Ils posent mal la question. Ils ne devraient pas s'inquiéter de savoir comment il faut faire pour enseigner, mais uniquement de **savoir comment il faut être pour pouvoir enseigner**[2].»

Cette déclaration, de même que celle que nous avons citée plus haut concernant l'«infidélité aux morts», fait en sorte qu'il est impossible de suivre les traces de Milani pas à pas, comme on le fait pour d'autres pédagogues illustres, vivants ou disparus — Freire et Freinet en tête —, dont dans bien des cas on adopte la méthode sans adopter l'intention, édulcorant ainsi leur message. Nous soulignons ici ce point, parce que les expériences qui se déroulent à la Maison-école Santiago Uno, à l'École d'agriculture Lorenzo-Milani — toutes deux situées à Salamanque — et dans d'autres écoles et centres pour adultes des périphéries urbaines et des milieux ruraux espagnols, sont toutes singulières, volontairement irrépétables et hétérogènes. On peut en dire autant des applications méthodologiques qu'on y fait: la lecture du journal, l'écriture collective, les visites et les voyages.

Ce qui est commun à toutes ces expériences, c'est **la façon d'être, plus que la façon de faire**. C'est pourquoi nous distinguerons bien l'être du faire, dans la description des stratégies d'éducation que nous allons aborder ci-après.

LE JOURNAL, POUR L'ALPHABÉTISATION ET LA CULTURE

D'abord, entendons-nous sur le sens du mot «culture». Pour les élèves de Barbiana, «**la vraie culture, celle que personne n'a encore possédée, se compose de deux éléments: appartenir à la masse et posséder la parole**[3]». D'après cette définition, nous devrions tous être mis dans la catégorie des gens incultes et une très grande majorité d'entre nous, dans celle des «analphabètes». Nous invitons le lecteur à bien se rendre compte que nous ne parlons pas ici de la culture traditionnelle. En poussant notre raisonnement jusqu'au bout, nous pourrions en déduire que cette grande majorité d'«analphabètes» se situeraient aux extrêmes du spectre: d'une part, la masse et, d'autre part, les personnes «cultivées», qui sont les plus éloignées des préoccupations de la majorité.

Car les **analphabètes** et les **gens incultes** ne sont pas semblables. Les uns, qui ignorent la vitalité qui anime la majorité, ont la chance de posséder

la culture dominante. Les autres, qui font partie d'un monde traditionnellement plus enclin à la coopération, ignorent les mécanismes et les clés de cette culture dominante.

Le processus logique de **culturisation** et d'**alphabétisation** passerait, pour les uns, par la reconnaissance et la mise en pratique de valeurs tombées en désuétude, comme la solidarité, et, pour les autres, par l'apprentissage des rouages de la culture officielle — posséder la parole — sans abandonner leur propre monde culturel. Toutefois, le problème que pose l'école vient en second lieu.

C'est ainsi que le processus d'alphabétisation, au sens large où nous employons ici ce terme, ne peut pas se produire dans un sens vertical — la culture se donnant et se recevant —, mais doit se produire dans un sens convergent : éducateurs et apprenants échangeant leurs modèles culturels respectifs, pour produire une nouvelle réalité.

Ce qui arrive, c'est que ce processus d'alphabétisation se «joue» toujours sur le terrain de l'équipe la plus puissante, si bien que la formulation qui précède passe difficilement du domaine de la théorie à celui de la pratique. De cette manière, ce qui a lieu dans un bon nombre de cas, c'est une contrefaçon de l'alphabétisation, une invasion culturelle que Freire a qualifiée d'«éducation bancaire».

Et cela arrive fréquemment, malgré la bonne volonté des éducateurs, plus soucieux des méthodes que du sens de leur travail. Fixons notre attention sur l'une de celles-ci, à laquelle nous avons eu recours à profusion : l'utilisation éducative du journal. C'est là une des méthodes les plus susceptibles d'une utilisation «bancaire». Il suffit que les journaux apparaissent dans un groupe d'adultes en cours de formation pour qu'on considère comme acquis qu'ils seront les instruments d'une éducation libératrice.

Au fond, cette vision superficielle de la question repose sur deux mythes très répandus à propos du travail avec les journaux et qu'il faut détruire. Le premier de ces mythes consiste à dire qu'avec la presse on introduit la vie dans l'école. Cette idée, bien intentionnée et fort répandue, est potentiellement très dangereuse, car elle entraîne une certaine forme de complaisance. Il suffirait d'introduire les journaux dans les écoles pour obtenir une interrelation très étroite entre l'école et la vie et pour pouvoir dès lors parler d'une éducation au service des adultes, ainsi que d'éducateurs modernes et libérés des méthodes d'autrefois. Toutefois, tout n'est pas si facile que cela. Cette idée n'en est pas moins un lieu commun destiné à épater la galerie. La presse n'est pas la vie. Bien plus, avec la presse, des points de vue qui ne sont pas objectifs sont introduits à l'école, ce qui est inquiétant. Il ne faut pas en conclure qu'on ne doit pas utiliser la presse, car les livres — y compris les manuels scolaires — présentent aussi une

vision de la vie qui n'est pas toujours objective, sans qu'on songe à les remettre en question. C'est que le système éducatif dans lequel nous évoluons — de même que tous les systèmes quels qu'ils soient — donne une vision de la vie qui est déformée en fonction des intérêts de certains.

L'avantage de la presse à cet égard réside dans le fait que ses déformations sont plus évidentes aux yeux du lecteur averti, vu qu'elles ont un caractère conjoncturel et n'ont pas la prétention de lui offrir des réponses globales. Cela permet de démythifier le texte imprimé et avec lui le brevet d'infaillibilité dont jouit la culture écrite — **ce qui est publié dans les livres** — aux yeux de l'homme de la rue.

Le deuxième mythe consiste à penser que le travail avec la presse vous libère. Cette idée, tout autant que la précédente, ne fait que confondre le moyen avec la fin. L'utilisation pure et simple des journaux dans les écoles pour adultes, si elle n'est pas accompagnée d'une réflexion minutieuse sur la fonction que remplissent les journaux, n'est pas autre chose qu'une forme d'abêtissement. Cela reviendrait plus ou moins à transmettre avec plus d'efficacité les valeurs de toujours, celles-là mêmes de l'école traditionnelle. Nous voilà donc bien avancés! Ce n'est pas le moyen qui libère. Il ne suffit pas de changer les outils de l'action éducative. L'usage des journaux ne sera libérateur qu'à condition que son but le soit et que celui-ci soit bien clair aux yeux de ceux qui participent au processus éducatif.

Mais, en fin de compte, un fois débarrassés des mythes et bien au courant du degré de partialité des journaux, quel chemin allons-nous donc prendre, quand nous aurons devant nous un groupe de jeunes du monde rural ou un cercle d'adultes d'une ville-dortoir?

Bien sûr, le chemin du paradoxe. C'est précisément parce que les journaux sont tendancieux et partiaux — comme tout, du reste — qu'il faut les utiliser. C'est justement parce qu'ils expriment la vision du monde de ceux qui dirigent qu'il y a lieu de les passer au crible. C'est précisément parce qu'ils emploient un jargon hermétique, qui n'est à la portée que de ceux qui possèdent la parole, qu'il faut les traduire. C'est justement parce que, s'ils sont utilisés sans méfiance, ils risquent de provoquer une invasion culturelle et une contrefaçon de l'**alphabétisation** qu'il faut les démasquer.

Or, il faut faire tout cela précisément avec des gens qui appartiennent à cette grande majorité des quartiers périphériques. Ce n'est pas pour eux que sont faits les journaux, où ils n'apparaissent que sporadiquement dans l'anonymat de la masse et toujours dans des circonstances négatives. Il faut le faire précisément dans l'intention d'**alphabétiser** ces gens, c'est-à-dire de les aider à mieux comprendre le monde, en tenant compte, de plus, qu'un journal, c'est quelque chose qui reste fort loin d'eux. Pourquoi?

Il est essentiel de donner une réponse à cette question pour affronter une telle tâche. Il nous paraît clair que les Espagnols, dans leur grande majorité, ne possèdent pas les clés dont ils auraient besoin pour lire les journaux. Il leur manque non seulement la maîtrise de ce jargon hermétique, mais encore les instruments linguistiques et le niveau culturel voulus pour comprendre suffisamment les mécanismes qui font fonctionner un monde aussi complexe que le nôtre. Mais, en outre, nous les Espagnols — en raison, assurément, de l'héritage néfaste du régime antérieur — nous manquons de sens collectif, c'est-à-dire de sens politique. La société espagnole n'a toujours pas réussi à se structurer : les chiffres montrent que la participation aux associations, de quelque nature qu'elles soient, reste faible. C'est ainsi que la vie décrite par les journaux, qui tourne autour de la vie collective, manque tout à fait d'intérêt pour la majorité d'une population qui ne comprend rien à ce qu'ils disent et qui semble avoir été poussée, en fonction d'un legs historique et par suite de l'exaltation actuelle de tout ce qui est privé, à choisir la voie d'un individualisme féroce.

Les journaux sont-ils donc un instrument adéquat pour l'alphabétisation ? Sans aucun doute. On pourrait même dire qu'ils constituent un instrument privilégié et indispensable, où s'entrecroisent, tout en s'affrontant, les carences en matière de moyens des uns et les carences humaines des autres. C'est pourquoi il faut utiliser les journaux, les passer au crible, les traduire et les dénoncer, afin de fondre de la sorte, en un seul et même processus, l'apprentissage du moyen et la saisie du sens que la réalité a pour chacun. En pratique, cela veut dire qu'il y a lieu d'éviter cette tendance qu'on a facilement, au premier abord, de vouloir rendre « pédagogiques » les contenus des journaux, c'est-à-dire les convertir en auxiliaires précieux pour organiser des jeux linguistiques ou mathématiques, comme on le faisait jadis avec les exercices de rédaction sur le printemps. Cette façon de faire, qui, comme nous l'avons indiqué plus haut, est bancaire, ne manque pas de désorienter et d'isoler les gens.

FACE À LA CULTURE DES PATRONS

Si l'on ne veut pas désorienter les gens, les isoler ou en faire des découpeurs de journaux, il faudra commencer par savoir à qui on a affaire dans le monde de la communication en Espagne. Il n'est pas toujours facile d'acquérir cette connaissance, mais celle-ci s'avère indispensable pour pouvoir lire l'information avec un minimum de garanties. Il faudra découvrir petit à petit quels sont les patrons de l'information, les groupes économiques et financiers, idéologiques et politiques qui contrôlent l'appareil national de l'information. Il conviendra essentiellement de jeter un coup d'œil sur :

— les principaux journaux nationaux et régionaux ;

— les groupes journalistiques ;

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— les agences de presse;

— les agences de publicité et les annonceurs.

Il convient d'être attentif aux changements de propriétaire, à la pénétration des capitaux et au débarquement des grands groupes multinationaux sur le marché espagnol de la communication. Tous ces mouvements, qui se produisent actuellement à un rythme accéléré, sont en train de modifier d'une façon significative le panorama de l'information dans notre pays. Les relations qu'on fait dans les titres des médias sont assez vite périmées et risquent de donner lieu à des équivoques. Mais, étant donné qu'il est compliqué de décoder des messages sans savoir qui les émet, ce travail ingrat est tout à fait nécessaire. De plus, il vous apprend à estimer à sa juste valeur le pluralisme apparent de l'information, qui est de plus en plus menacé, à cause de la tendance irrépressible à la concentration des médias.

Après cela, il s'impose de procéder à l'analyse de la structure des journaux. Quels sont les projets des entreprises de presse, leur développement technologique et surtout leurs sources de financement? Ce chapitre du financement apportera de nouvelles lumières sur un autre type d'influence qui s'exerce sur l'information, avant qu'elle aboutisse au lecteur. Évaluer la part que les coûts de distribution et de publicité représentent dans le prix de revient pour une entreprise de presse donnée est un exercice qu'il faut faire et qui clarifie bien des choses.

L'étude de la structure des entreprises de presse pourrait être suivie de l'analyse formelle du **journal en tant qu'objet**. C'est ici que commence, à vrai dire, le travail de décodage, étant donné que celui qui lit un journal n'est pas conscient du fait que telle ou telle présentation de l'information constitue déjà une manipulation. Il nous paraît donc important de nous attacher à l'analyse de la distribution des espaces, des structures et des suppléments, mais par-dessus tout à leur hiérarchisation et aux critères suivant lesquels celle-ci est faite.

Sur cette route que nous avons empruntée, viendrait ensuite l'étude de la structure de la nouvelle. Pour qui sait comment sont les nouvelles vues du dedans, le travail qui reste à faire est beaucoup plus facile. C'est aussi l'occasion d'aborder les différents genres journalistiques.

Ce n'est qu'après cette démarche qu'il est permis d'entreprendre un travail de décodage du contenu des nouvelles et des codes linguistiques dans lesquels ceux-ci sont formulés. Il s'agit là d'un travail de **traduction** du langage journalistique — qui est un des langages cultivés — au langage populaire, qui garantira la compréhension profonde des messages. Nous faisons cela de diverses manières, en fonction du contexte et du groupe qui s'applique à cette tâche. Ce peut être une lecture où les participants seront assis en cercle, du genre de celle qui a été décrite plus haut, et où

l'on essaiera de prendre conscience de la réalité quotidienne. Cela peut être l'analyse en profondeur de la nouvelle qui apparaîtra chaque jour comme étant la plus importante pour le groupe : on la démontera et on la reconstruira, en partant de la perspective de ceux qui n'écriront jamais dans les journaux. On peut aussi se mettre à suivre une seule et même nouvelle qui évolue, pendant un laps de temps, un trimestre en général, ce qui procure une connaissance exhaustive de l'affaire, ainsi que les circonstances qui l'entourent et en déterminent le déroulement. Cela pourra encore se faire d'autres manières... Peu importe, à condition que la presse soit utilisée pour être passée au crible, traduite et démasquée.

Abordons maintenant un travail connexe : la rédaction de journaux par les groupes en formation, tels que *La Bronca* de Santiago Uno (Salamanque), déjà cité, ou *Al loro* (*À l'ouvrage*) du Centre d'adultes d'Alcorcon (Madrid). Il ne s'agit pas de revues littéraires, mais de journaux, comme on en prépare dans la plupart des centres éducatifs. Ce sont des journaux d'information, contenant des nouvelles qui intéressent la communauté où ils sont diffusés. Ils sont financés par les moyens auxquels les journaux recourent habituellement, comme la publicité et la vente. Tout cela est inspiré par un double objectif. D'une part, on veut **connaître du dedans** les conditionnements, les conflits que créent les intérêts divergents, les contraintes et les limites de la profession de journaliste, qui est si souvent idéalisée par les gens peu instruits. D'autre part, on souhaite que ce journal serve de **moyen d'expression**, aussi modeste soit-il, à ceux qui ne prennent jamais la parole.

Dans tout usage du journal en classe, il sera indispensable de reconstruire les nouvelles. Le point faible du récepteur est sa passivité à l'égard des médias. Pour triompher de celle-ci, il ne suffit pas, comme disent certains, de convertir de temps à autre le récepteur en un petit émetteur de ses propres messages. La production de journaux scolaires, aussi bien qu'elle se fasse, n'est pas suffisante. On y apprend les trucs de la presse, ses limites et ses contraintes. C'est là un acquis précieux pour le jour où l'on prend vraiment un journal en main. Mais cela risque même de créer un profond scepticisme et une indifférence telle qu'elle finit par s'appliquer à n'importe quelle nouvelle. Or, cela n'est pas bon.

Bertrand Russell a dit que «**l'école devait enseigner aux enfants l'art de lire les journaux avec incrédulité**». Cela, c'est tout autre chose. À la différence du scepticisme, l'incrédulité est active. Or, c'est bien là ce dont il s'agit : se transformer en un interprète actif, et cesser d'être un individu passif et négatif, qui s'exclut lui-même de la société.

Interpréter ne veut pas toujours dire atteindre le but ni, encore moins, obtenir la vérité au moyen de «contacts» personnels et intransmissibles. Il ne s'agit pas non plus d'être pédant, mais bien plutôt de chercher sans répit la vérité relative. Bien sûr, «relative» veut dire «non absolue»,

mais ce n'est pas ce qu'il y a ici de plus important. Nous voulons dire **la vérité relative à la masse**, en fonction de laquelle nous avons déjà dit que nous faisions notre lecture : la vérité qu'il y a derrière la nouvelle et qui nous concerne.

Voyons un exemple. Après avoir suivi pendant des semaines un même thème journalistique (nos monographies, comme nous les appelons) ou bien après avoir soigneusement démonté une nouvelle en particulier, le groupe doit mettre par écrit sa propre version. À cet égard, il évoquera les événements qui ont précédé l'affaire, pour bien situer les faits récents. Ensuite, il se posera les six questions de base du journalisme : **qui ? quoi ? quand ? comment ? où ? et pourquoi ?** À ces questions, nous ajoutons le récit, **les événements qui ont précédé et les conséquences**. Pour peu qu'on lise une nouvelle du point de vue des parias de l'histoire, des plus démunis de la société, plus rien ne tient debout.

C'est là un exercice amusant et passionnant, ouvert sur les conséquences qui doivent encore se produire. C'est aussi un exercice difficile pour les enseignants qui croient à l'école neutre et pensent qu'ils doivent dissimuler leurs opinions. Lorsqu'ils travaillent auprès d'adultes, beaucoup croient devoir esquiver ces questions délicates qui risquent de troubler la paix scolaire. Bien au contraire, celles-ci fournissent une occasion rêvée pour exercer la vraie démocratie, afin que l'enseignant devienne le garant absolu de la liberté d'expression de toutes les opinions — y compris la sienne —, non seulement celles de ceux qui sont présents, mais encore les opinions de ceux qui ne sont pas là pour les exposer. Tout avis contraire mérite de retenir l'attention et d'autant plus s'il est minoritaire. C'est là une bonne occasion pour écrire au tableau les points de vue des uns et des autres, ainsi que pour obliger tout le monde à réfléchir et même à s'exposer aux arguments d'autrui. (Un exercice classique de rhétorique n'est pas non plus malvenu, de temps à autre.) On surmonte l'absence de la vérité en la cherchant avec empressement. De même, on remédie à la nostalgie de la neutralité en accordant de l'estime à son adversaire. C'est ainsi que les choses devraient également se passer dans la vie.

L'article rédigé par le groupe ne doit pas nécessairement être unanime. On peut y exprimer la divergence de certains en ce qui concerne l'interprétation des faits ou introduire la référence tirée de la presse officielle, ou encore prévoir les diverses conséquences possibles.

DONNER ENSEMBLE UN NOUVEAU NOM AU MONDE : L'ÉCRITURE COLLECTIVE

La meilleure méthode pour arriver à cette rédaction active et nouvelle d'après les règles journalistiques est l'écriture collective. C'est là le véritable sommet de la pédagogie de Milani. Celui-ci veut que parle enfin

la majorité silencieuse de la terre. Jusqu'à présent, les pauvres (cultivateurs, pêcheurs, ouvriers, bergers, etc.) n'écrivaient pas de livres. À vrai dire, ils n'en lisaient pas non plus beaucoup. Presque aucun d'eux n'en achète et il n'y a d'ailleurs pas de place dans leur maison pour les ranger. S'ils ont déjà lu, ils ont lu les livres que d'autres avaient écrits. En effet, on nous a tous expliqué à l'école les livres des grands auteurs. On nous a dit que ces auteurs étaient des génies qu'il fallait admirer et imiter, si l'on voulait écrire quelque chose. Nous avons de la sorte ajouté foi à plusieurs erreurs. Premièrement, que l'art d'écrire est un privilège, presque un don des dieux. Deuxièmement, que c'est un travail individuel et non un travail de groupe. Troisièmement, que c'est l'affaire d'un petit nombre, qui s'adresse à une minorité. Quatrièmement, que pour en arriver à écrire, il faut lire les œuvres de ces écrivains du passé comme le font les écrivains actuels, qui se lisent également entre eux.

L'écriture collective suit un processus inverse de celui qui consiste à développer des idées schématisées. Il s'agit plutôt d'un processus d'induction à partir d'idées éparses, des intuitions et des balbutiements de chacun. Écrits sur de petits bouts de papier, ces points de départ sont classés, réunis ou séparés par thèmes, après de simples exercices d'analyse et de comparaison qui fournissent les différents chapitres ou les aspects de la question. On ne supprime rien, si ce n'est de pures répétitions. Une fois qu'on a classé les petits papiers dans chaque chapitre, avec les contradictions et tous les détails qu'ils contiennent, on les transcrit de manière que tout le monde puisse les avoir devant soi. Vient ensuite le moment de la révision collective, de la confrontation des opinions, de la mise en ordre des idées et du choix du mot le plus juste pour exprimer avec précision ce qu'on voulait dire. Au début, les participants n'y arrivaient pas. Aucun d'eux n'aurait été capable d'écrire tout le texte par ses propres moyens. À présent, ils apprennent à le faire en groupe, la lumière jaillit et ils trouvent le mot juste. Le «**nous**» communautaire jaillit en même temps parmi eux, grâce à l'écrit collectif.

Arrive enfin le moment de travailler le style, de supprimer tout ce qui est de trop et de choisir ce qui paraît le plus clair pour les lecteurs de la masse (et non pour l'élite). C'est un moment de créativité et, tout à la fois, de découverte: la réalité se trouve là au-dehors, dans les ténèbres épaisses de tout ce que nous ne maîtrisons pas, mais quand nous lui donnons un nom, elle se transfigure et nous apparaît dans tout son éclat. Apprendre à parler, c'est apprendre à obéir. C'est apprendre à donner au monde le nom qui a été choisi par celui qui le met en ordre et se le soumet. C'est pourquoi il est important que ces adultes deviennent des sujets, en donnant eux-mêmes un nom à tous les objets de l'univers dans lequel ils vivent. C'est là une tâche humaine primordiale, qui offre plus de garanties si on l'accomplit en équipe, au milieu de la masse qui subit et vit son environnement. Il y a place aussi pour la divergence, comme nous l'avons déjà dit plus haut, c'est-à-dire pour la comparaison et pour l'attention prêtée

aux opinions des autres. Si l'on ne parvient pas à tomber d'accord, le texte final n'en sera que plus riche, grâce à la diversité des points de vue.

À l'école de Barbiana, l'écriture collective est devenue un travail d'artisan, au service de l'œuvre d'art. La *Lettre à une maîtresse d'école* décrit cela d'une manière surprenante et profonde. L'écriture collective est déjà fort connue et appréciée dans le monde de l'art et aussi dans celui de la sociologie. Elle devrait être également appréciée dans le monde chrétien:

> «[...] seulement des injures et des gros mots me venaient à la bouche. En écrivant ici, nous sommes parvenus à contenir ces mots avec un peu d'effort et à les transformer en opinions claires. De cette manière, nous avons compris ce qu'est l'art: trouver l'ennemi, réfléchir, chercher l'aide d'amis, au cours d'un patient travail en équipe, et voir alors peu à peu émerger ce qu'il y a d'authentique caché sous la haine. L'œuvre d'art voit le jour: une main tendue à l'ennemi, afin qu'il change[4].»

Toute cette expérience éducative passe par la stimulation du désir d'apprendre. Elle se situe fort loin de la satisfaction du besoin d'intégration dans le monde établi et vise plutôt le rejet de la marginalisation et du monde qui la provoque. Transformer même la haine en une main tendue est une véritable prouesse éducative. D'autres éducateurs auraient tenté d'apaiser cette haine. Milani, au contraire, la provoque, dans le cadre de la pédagogie de la non-violence où il s'inscrit lui-même explicitement. Milani ne méprise pas l'agressivité, mais il la dirige. Au cours de sa première expérience comme instituteur, alors qu'il se découvrait lui-même tel qu'il était, il a écrit le texte suivant, dont la grande lucidité nous surprend:

> «Je ne rayonne pas la sainteté. Je ne suis même pas un curé sympathique. J'ai plutôt tout ce qu'il faut pour éloigner les gens. Même à l'école, je suis enquiquinant, intolérant et impitoyable. Je ne m'entends pas avec les jeunes gens, je n'ai pas de qualité particulière pour les attirer. Mais j'ai seulement été astucieux. J'ai su appuyer sur le bouton qui a fait sortir leurs plus profondes qualités. Pour ma part, je n'avais pas de richesses. C'étaient eux qui en regorgeaient, sans que personne ne le sût. J'ai piqué leur amour-propre, réveillé leur générosité naturelle et mis à vif l'angoisse sociale qui caractérise notre siècle. J'ai dès lors touché, dans le fond de son cœur, l'instinct de révolte de l'homme et le désir d'affirmation de sa dignité de serviteur de Dieu et de personne d'autre[5].»

La *Lettre à une maîtresse d'école* est elle-même le fruit de cette méthode d'écriture collective et — ce qui est plus important — de cette pédagogie. C'est aussi le cas des *Écrits collectifs de garçons du peuple*[6], rédigés par les jeunes de Santiago Uno. C'est encore le cas de bien d'autres œuvres de dimension et de nature différentes, jamais publiées, qui ont été écrites par divers groupes: des adultes apprentis lecteurs ou faisant partie de groupes insérés dans des formations de base, des jeunes gens issus de milieux peu favorisés et des enfants d'âge scolaire.

Toutes ces œuvres ont un élément commun, un aspect trop souvent oublié dans les écoles, qui ont coutume de consacrer une bonne partie du temps à la répétition routinière de connaissances mortes et dénuées de sens. C'est ce qu'on pourrait définir comme étant la première règle de l'écrit: **avoir quelque chose d'important à dire**, qui soit utile pour tout le monde ou pour un grand nombre de gens. Cela veut dire qu'on ne parle pas pour le plaisir de parler, qu'on ne se livre pas à ce verbiage creux et rhétorique, qui n'a d'autre fin que lui-même et désamorce toute tentative de contact avec la réalité.

Et dire cela — l'écrire — pour qu'on le lise, c'est-à-dire pour expliquer sa propre position partout où cela est nécessaire, pour exposer des vues différentes de celles que les discours dominants répandent partout, pour essayer d'exercer une influence avec la parole collective et solidaire du groupe et même pour exprimer les divergences au sein même de celui-ci.

Les formes varient: depuis le livre jusqu'à la réflexion qui évalue le travail réalisé par le groupe, en passant par la lettre adressée aux journaux pour exprimer des revendications ou des remerciements, l'article qui informera des activités menées à bonne fin ou exprimera une opinion sur un sujet préoccupant ou toute autre espèce d'écrit. Quelle que soit la formule adoptée, tous ces écrits contiennent un profond et passionnant travail de discussion, de compréhension et d'éclaircissement de ses idées propres et de celles d'autrui. La frivolité n'y a pas place, car il ne s'agit pas ici de faire des rédactions scolaires ni de jouer à la démocratie. C'est assurément une activité qui diffère tout à fait de ce que décrivaient les élèves de Barbiana, en faisant allusion à certaines pratiques scolaires:

> «On m'a dit que dans certaines écoles américaines, à chaque mot prononcé par l'instituteur, la moitié des élèves de la classe lèvent la main et disent: «Je suis d'accord.» L'autre moitié des élèves disent: «Je ne suis pas d'accord.» La fois suivante, on renverse les rôles de chaque moitié de la classe et tous les élèves continuent à mâcher leur chewing-gum le plus sérieusement du monde[7].»

APPRENDRE AU CŒUR DE LA VIE : L'OBJECTION DE CONSCIENCE

Une dernière pratique pédagogique mérite de retenir notre attention : **les visites**. Voyager, sortir de chez soi est, à l'école Santiago Uno, une « matière obligatoire », où l'on apprend beaucoup de choses et où l'on mesure en même temps ce qu'on a appris. C'est une bonne méthode didactique d'étude et d'évaluation. Mais l'apprentissage se fait aussi au cours de rencontres, soigneusement préparées, avec les visiteurs de l'école. Une séance hebdomadaire d'une heure et demie serait suffisante pour habituer les jeunes à poser des questions. Comme ils le disent eux-mêmes dans le texte collectif qui suit : « On apprend ainsi à maîtriser la parole, à parler en public, à engager une conversation avec les gens, ainsi qu'à vaincre notre peur et notre timidité. Dans cette salle, on étudie et on écrit, mais surtout on parle. C'est le parloir de la Maison-école. Nous y parlons de notre vie et des gens de l'extérieur y viennent pour répondre à nos questions. »

En d'autres termes, le visiteur accepte de **se laisser interroger** et est libre de répondre ou non. Mais il ne vient pas donner une conférence ni profiter de n'importe quelle question pour développer en long et en large ses idées. Tous les jeunes sont obligés d'intervenir. L'un ou l'autre d'entre eux pourra interrompre le visiteur qui serait trop loquace, en lui disant : « Vous ne répondez pas à la question qu'on vous a posée. »

Tout comme dans le cas de la presse, il importe d'être un interprète actif et non un pur et simple récepteur. On accueillera parfois des personnalités importantes, mais, au fond, toutes les personnes sont importantes, même si elles n'occupent pas des postes de premier plan. C'est ainsi qu'on recevra aussi des jeunes, semblables aux nôtres, venus d'autres écoles, et des gens ordinaires, qui sont intéressants du seul fait qu'ils font partie de la masse. Une fois que les visiteurs seront partis, on consacrera un certain temps à réfléchir sur ce qu'on aura vécu avec eux, à rédiger soigneusement les notes qu'on aura prises durant l'entrevue, à relever les mots clés (qui ouvrent la porte aux questions fondamentales), etc. Enfin, il y aura une mise en commun, au cours de laquelle on analysera avec le plus grand calme ce qui s'est passé.

Il en ira de même au retour des voyages que font les jeunes, deux par deux. Cela vaut mieux que les voyages en groupe, encore que ceux-ci aient aussi leur utilité. Les compagnons se poseront des questions entre eux, tandis que l'enseignant soulèvera des questions sur des aspects qu'on oublie au premier abord. L'intérêt va en croissant d'un voyage à l'autre, les yeux et les oreilles s'ouvrent davantage et l'interprète actif de la réalité vécue (et non plus seulement décrite dans les journaux) devient plus libre. Cependant, il n'est pas toujours plus efficace.

En comprenant la réalité, on fait un pas pour la transformer, mais cela ne suffit pas. Il y a peu de choses qui changent dans notre monde.

Selon cette pédagogie, il est essentiel de cultiver l'**objection de conscience** comme attitude générale devant la loi: la loi officielle — qui est la force du fort, et non du faible — ou la loi sociale de la coutume et de la masse colonisée par la propagande du pouvoir économique. L'objection de conscience fait partie du domaine de l'expression, de l'identité personnelle, et non du domaine de l'action, où il s'agit toujours d'obtenir quelque chose. Il faut parfois conquérir sa propre autonomie et dire non, quand tout pousse à dire oui. À cet égard, l'attitude de l'éducateur s'avère fondamentale:

> «[...] je ne puis pas dire à mes garçons que la seule manière d'aimer la loi est d'y obéir. Ce que je puis leur dire, c'est qu'ils devront prendre les lois des hommes en considération, de telle façon qu'ils ne les observent que si elles sont justes (c'est-à-dire si elles sont la force du faible). En revanche, lorsqu'ils se rendront compte qu'elles ne sont pas justes (c'est-à-dire quand elles sanctionnent les abus du plus fort), ils devront lutter pour qu'on les change.
>
> «Le moyen officiel pour changer la loi est le vote. La constitution lui ajoute aussi la grève.
>
> «Mais le vrai levier de ces deux commandes du pouvoir consiste à exercer une influence par la parole et l'exemple sur les autres voteurs et les autres grévistes. Et le moment venu, il n'y a pas de plus grande école que de payer de sa propre personne une objection de conscience, c'est-à-dire violer la loi qu'on estime mauvaise et accepter la peine de celle-ci prévoit. [...]
>
> «Avoir le courage de dire aux jeunes gens que tous sont libres et que pour eux l'obéissance n'est plus une vertu, mais la plus subtile des tentations; qu'ils ne s'imaginent pas pouvoir s'en tirer avec elle, ni devant les hommes ni devant Dieu; que chacun doit se sentir le seul et unique responsable de tout[8].»

Une éducation émancipatrice, qui cherche non pas à intégrer, mais à libérer les individus et à les aider à s'affirmer, risque de provoquer le choc des apprenants contre les structures établies, d'entraîner l'échec et l'amertume. C'est pourquoi il est essentiel de créer et d'encourager la **fête** qui célèbre l'être (à la différence des vacances, qui compensent les efforts du travail, et du divertissement, qui rompt la monotonie de la routine). La fête qui est motivée, la fête qui a un sens, la fête en l'honneur de toute chose ou de tout événement qui le mérite. Enfin, la fête pour célébrer l'«être» des nôtres, encore que nous ne puissions pas célébrer leur richesse

matérielle. La fête qui affirme qu'on se trouve du côté du bien, ce qui n'est pas la même chose que de posséder des biens matériels. La distinction entre les deux caractérise l'état d'âme quotidien de ceux qui apprennent à «être» face à ce monde puissant et creux.

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NOTES

1. MILANI, L., *Instituteur et curé de Barbiana. Expériences pastorales*, Madrid, Marsiega, 1975.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

3. ELÈVES DE L'ECOLE DE BARBIANA, *Lettre à une maîtresse d'école*, Barcelone, Hogar del Libro, 1982, p. 107.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 131-132.

5. MILANI, L., *op. cit.*, p. 226-227.

6. MAISON-ECOLE SANTIAGO UNO, *Écrits collectifs de garçons du peuple*, Madrid, Popular, 1979.

7. ELÈVES DE L'ECOLE DE BARBIANA, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

8. MILANI, L., « Lettre aux juges », *Sinite*, 49, 1976, p. 117-118 et 126.

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IL Y A UN URGENT BESOIN D'IMAGINATION: UN CONCOURS D'ÉCRITURE

Francesco Azzimonti
CLAP Rhône-Alpes
Lyon, France

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SI J'AVAIS PAR ÉCRIT

Si j'avais par écrit l'histoire de mes gens.

Si j'avais par écrit le récit de ma naissance, par ma mère, orage, guerre, bicyclette, fatigue, travail, anxiété, spasme, pluie, sept mois, couveuse.

Si j'avais par écrit les ragots de mon quartier, les histoires de telle maison, de ses enfants, de ses femmes et leurs amants. Et des morts aussi.

Si j'avais par écrit les chansons de jeunes filles criées dans les champs, la riposte des garçons à l'autre bout du champ.

Si j'avais par écrit l'histoire du pain gagné, des mains noires de mon père, du vin désiré, du bois et du charbon à brûler, les pieds dans le four à réchauffer, des œufs durs et de la salade amère.

Si j'avais par écrit l'histoire d'une famille, petit peuple, et sa rage d'avancer, QU'EST-CE QUE JE LIRAIS AUJOURD'HUI?

UN POÈME, UN CONTE...
EXPRIMEZ-VOUS POUR GAGNER UN CONCOURS

*L'ORANGE BLEUE**

Il était un fois un petit prince blond, qui vivait dans un pays plein de fleurs et de fruits de toutes les couleurs et de toutes les saveurs. Il n'aurait pas eu besoin de voyager loin: dans son jardin, il y avait presque toutes les fleurs et les fruits des autres pays du monde. Et dans son jardin se promenaient toute la journée, pour jouer, beaucoup de garçons et de filles de tous les pays et de toutes les couleurs!

Mais, lui, le petit prince qui devait succéder à son père plus tard, n'avait pas le droit de se promener dans ce jardin; il ne voyait tout cela

* Conte de l'auteur publié dans *CLAP Info — Rhône-Alpes*, n° 23-24, février-mars 1990.

que par la fenêtre. La nuit, quand tout était calme, il se levait en cachette pour épier par la fenêtre les fleurs qui dormaient et les fruits qui échangeaient leurs parfums. Le petit prince était tout le temps enfermé dans ses chambres, car il devait étudier et apprendre sans relâche, et suivre stage sur stage, pour devenir le premier du royaume plus tard. Il apprenait la grammaire et l'orthographe, les astres et l'électronique, il s'exerçait dans les langues étrangères et dans tous les codes de bonne conduite... Il était entouré de dictionnaires et de papiers, de crayons et de gommes, de calculettes et d'ordinateurs, avec des personnes très sages autour de lui pour bien l'encadrer et lui faire faire des devoirs et apprendre ses leçons. Tout était gris autour de lui...

De temps en temps, ce petit prince voyait (ou rêvait ?) entre les pages des livres et les touches des ordinateurs une sorte de bulle, pareille à une orange, avec une étrange couleur, proche du bleu foncé, parfois avec toutes sortes de dégradés de couleurs qui s'emmêlaient.

Petit à petit, cette bulle orange bleue, il la voyait apparaître aussi quand il regardait par la fenêtre dans son jardin... On lui dit que peut-être il était daltonien. Il n'alla pas chercher dans ses livres ce que ce mot voulait dire; il pensait que c'était tellement beau de voir le monde en couleurs que si c'était être daltonien, il allait devenir un daltonien volontaire. Il essayait ainsi chaque jour un peu plus de placer partout sa bulle orange bleue pour voir le monde, et il découvrit assez tôt qu'il pouvait voir les couleurs changeantes des fleurs et des fruits de son jardin, la variété étonnante des visages des garçons et des filles qui s'amusaient dans le jardin. Il pouvait mettre ensemble le vert, le rouge, l'orange, le bleu ciel, le violet et même inventer des nuances de couleurs jamais vues jusqu'alors. Il découvrait que cela valait vraiment la peine de lire la réalité avec des règles et des couleurs qui sortaient un peu du gris monocorde de ses livres, de ses machines, de ses professeurs.

Il prit ses plumes et ses crayons, ses calculettes et ses ordinateurs, ses dictionnaires et ses grammaires, il passa par la fenêtre et descendit dans le jardin. Arrivé en bas, tous ses crayons étaient devenus des pinceaux et des feutres colorés, tous ses livres et ses machines étaient devenus des palettes de peintre où apparaissaient les couleurs de l'arc-en-ciel. C'est ainsi qu'il se mit à écrire et à peindre, avec ses camarades, des histoires toutes en couleurs, où se mêlaient des voyages et des contes, des proverbes et des formules magiques, des aventures d'hommes et d'animaux, des chiffres et des lettres, des dessins et des poèmes...

Il y avait des couleurs partout et on pouvait écrire partout dans ce jardin, comme on voulait. Le petit prince montrait à tout le monde comment voir le monde en couleurs, vert-rouge-orange-d'or-bleu-violet, et comment on

pouvait trouver du bonheur en écrivant avec les couleurs et les signes de la rage et de la douceur, de la passion et de la fatigue, des larmes et des sourires, des souvenirs et de l'anticipation, de l'analyse et de l'amour...

Franco

LE COMITÉ DE LIAISON POUR L'ALPHABÉTISATION ET LA PROMOTION

Son histoire dans le contexte français

Depuis de nombreuses années, le Comité de liaison pour l'alphabétisation et la promotion (CLAP) travaille sur le terrain de l'analphabétisme et de l'illettrisme, avec une approche originale: ne pas confiner les illettrés dans des problèmes d'ordre technique et purement linguistique, mais situer tout apprentissage dans une perspective de promotion tant personnelle que collective.

Depuis plus de 20 ans, le CLAP a connu des évolutions importantes qui ont accompagné les mutations de la société française par rapport au phénomène migratoire et aux dynamiques d'insertion sociale et professionnelle. À l'origine, à partir de 1968, on trouve une poignée d'associations qui ont voulu se doter d'un outil commun, d'un «comité de liaison» qui soutienne leurs démarches d'alphabétisation d'un public d'adultes migrants non scolarisés ou très peu scolarisés dans sa langue d'origine; les besoins de ces personnes se conjuguent alors avec l'apprentissage de la langue française parlée et écrite afin de se situer dans l'environnement de leur nouvelle société de vie.

Au fil des années, le réseau associatif s'élargit. Nationales, régionales ou locales, les associations qui adhèrent au CLAP — y compris des fédérations d'associations — agissent dans les domaines de l'information, de la formation, de la promotion sociale, professionnelle et culturelle d'immigrés et de Français, de la lutte contre la discrimination et pour une réelle insertion.

Les buts du CLAP s'enrichissent des objectifs des associations adhérentes: développer l'alphabétisation, favoriser la promotion sociale et professionnelle des étrangers et des personnes culturellement à l'écart de la société, lutter contre le racisme et œuvrer à la construction d'une société interculturelle. Le Comité a pour objectif central de soutenir les revendications de l'immigration concernant:

— la formation et la promotion des immigrés, particulièrement la lutte contre l'analphabétisme, terrain privilégié d'action contre l'exclusion sociale;

— l'expression culturelle, les droits des cultures différentes et l'apprentissage des langues d'origine;

— la reconnaissance réelle des droits civiques des immigrés et de leurs organisations.

Les moyens que le Comité a mis en œuvre pour la réalisation de ces objectifs sont les suivants:

— Regrouper et coordonner sur l'ensemble du territoire français les efforts des associations adhérentes;

— Faciliter les échanges d'information et d'expériences entre tous les groupements d'individus poursuivant les mêmes buts et favoriser la création partout où le besoin s'en fait sentir de centres d'alphabétisation et de promotion;

— Être un centre de recherche et d'information sur les méthodes pédagogiques et les moyens didactiques appropriés et mettre éventuellement en place des actions expérimentales;

— Permettre une meilleure connaissance des problèmes socio-culturels des populations défavorisées et éveiller l'opinion publique à leurs problèmes;

— Entreprendre auprès des pouvoirs publics, collectivités et autres organismes, toutes démarches susceptibles de concourir à la réalisation de ses buts;

— Encourager la création de comités régionaux, pour renforcer son efficacité et se rapprocher des associations;

— Éditer une revue périodique, élaborer des outils pédagogiques et mettre en œuvre tous les moyens d'information nécessaires.

Se plaçant résolument dans les rangs des associations, mouvements et organismes luttant contre l'exclusion sociale en France, le CLAP peut actuellement, à la lumière de ses premières expériences, s'ouvrir au développement local urbain et rural. La pénétration de ce terrain, lieu privilégié d'initiatives dynamiques, fait apparaître le besoin de soutien aux associations locales, aux groupes de quartier, voire de formation d'agents de développement. L'instauration du revenu minimum d'insertion (RMI), avec son contrat d'insertion, amplifie encore le caractère prioritaire de ce type d'actions. Ce nouvel espace de vie et d'activités à l'échelon des quartiers et des communes est, comme l'école, l'un des lieux privilégiés pour la démarginalisation, c'est-à-dire pour l'insertion des exclus. L'évolution du CLAP

dans ses objectifs et sa pratique découle de l'évolution du contexte et des besoins exprimés par les associations et les publics intéressés. Elle doit se poursuivre par de nouveaux types d'actions à imaginer et à construire.

Des étapes importantes

1978

L'assemblée générale a débattu un rapport intitulé « Propositions pour un réseau public de formation des adultes en France ». L'assemblée générale s'est prononcée pour la mise en place progressive d'un réseau public de formation constitué par la présence à tous les niveaux (local, régional, national):

— des organismes réalisateurs d'activités de formation;

— des organisations et mouvements populaires (partenaires sociaux, particulièrement les organisations syndicales);

— d'organisations d'immigrés, ce qui suppose que toutes les entraves à l'exercice du droit d'expression et d'association dont sont victimes les migrants soient abolies;

— des pouvoirs publics.

Ce réseau public devrait être décentralisé au maximum, recevoir des pouvoirs publics une mission de nature publique et être susceptible de s'inscrire à plus long terme dans un dispositif général de formation continue intéressant tous les adultes, nationaux ou étrangers, sans pour autant gommer la spécificité de la formation des immigrés.

1981

« Vers une société interculturelle: vivre ensemble, c'est possible. » La motion de l'assemblée générale dresse un constat d'espoir et invite à la vigilance quant à l'évolution de l'immigration. La notion de « population en transit » n'a plus de consistance, le phénomène migratoire est « structurel ». Ce qu'une bonne partie de la société française refuse. Les perspectives du mouvement associatif doivent tenir compte d'un contexte économique en pleine expansion, d'un contexte social difficile, des contradictions qui surgissent au sein même des communautés immigrées et du changement politique. L'assemblée générale propose pour orientation l'insertion réelle des immigrés dans un réseau de relations sociales. Cette orientation principale doit se caractériser par la démarginalisation. Dans ce sens, des suggestions d'action sont faites pour lever les obstacles majeurs qui s'opposent à la progression vers une société multiculturelle.

875

1985

L'assemblée générale, sur le thème « Le CLAP et les jeunes », a mis l'accent sur la nécessité de prendre en considération le mouvement associatif issu des jeunes, dont les débats interpellent la société, et a affirmé sa volonté de mettre en œuvre des pratiques répondant aux besoins et aux aspirations de ce mouvement. Plus concrètement, il était traité de la formation, de la culture, de l'autonomie associative des jeunes et des relations de partenariat, du nécessaire débat de société et de ses enjeux multiples.

En janvier 1983 le CLAP avait promu un colloque à l'Unesco sur le thème : « Vers une société interculturelle » ; en octobre 1985 une journée d'étude européenne avait lieu à l'Unesco : « Lire les mutations pour agir et former ».

1988

« Vers le CLAP des années 90. » La motion d'orientation de l'assemblée générale définit une double ouverture, « méditerranéenne et européenne », dans la perspective de l'Acte unique européen.

Le CLAP Rhône-Alpes et le concours d'écriture

Dans la région Rhône-Alpes, le CLAP est un espace d'échange et de réflexion pour plus d'une cinquantaine d'associations. Il agit essentiellement auprès des animateurs et militants associatifs et auprès des formateurs et animateurs sociaux. Ces médiateurs sont, à notre avis, un potentiel de changement social pour que puissent se produire une reconnaissance et une valorisation des publics défavorisés, qui ont une place à prendre dans le fonctionnement de la société actuelle et future.

Promouvoir et favoriser les diversités, faire « par » et « avec » les médiateurs pour créer un processus de changement et de développement des groupes et des personnes, tel est le grand objectif de l'équipe qui travaille en Rhône-Alpes.

La proposition d'un « concours » d'écriture pour « ceux qui ne savent pas bien écrire » était tout à fait dans cette logique : fêter l'Année internationale de l'alphabétisation en donnant, pour une fois, la parole et la plume aux exclus de l'écrit, à ceux, Français ou immigrés, que l'on qualifie souvent trop vite l'illettrés ou d'analphabètes. En conviant ainsi à « entrer dans l'écriture par l'écriture », le CLAP Rhône-Alpes a voulu donner à la lutte contre l'illettrisme un côté vivant et concret. *Il y a un urgent besoin d'imagination dans les actions contre l'illettrisme et d'alphabétisation.* Loin de toute démarche d'assistanat, puisque l'« illettré » est invité ainsi non seulement à écrire, mais aussi et surtout à se prendre en charge lui-même et à exprimer enfin ses propres désirs et pensées. Ouvert, donc, à tous les

adultes qui «ont des choses à dire, aimeraient les écrire mais n'ont jamais osé», ce concours l'était également à toute forme d'écrit (récit, correspondance, poème, proverbe, conte, etc.). Une ouverture large pour que chacun ait assez d'espace pour relever le défi à la mesure de ses capacités.

Ce projet avait trois objectifs prioritaires:

— Faire des personnes analphabètes et illettrées des producteurs et destinataires d'écrits. Que les personnes puissent, dans leur tête et avec leurs mains, mobiliser les ressources de communication qu'elles ont enfouies en elles-mêmes. Elles ont certainement du «sens» à exprimer, par leur histoire et leur imagination. Elles ont certainement des formes de passage à l'écrit qu'elles peuvent trouver et s'engager à élaborer;

— Créer, par là, un espace de créativité, au niveau régional, pour promouvoir l'expression et la communication des exclus de l'écrit. Proposer des réseaux d'échanges, où la parole et la plume des intéressés eux-mêmes prime sur la médiation d'une culture officielle et standardisée et sur la délégation du savoir aux formateurs et aux intermédiaires sociaux;

— Impulser, à cette occasion, un renouvellement des pratiques pédagogiques dans la région, en permettant aux formateurs et aux apprenants de se mesurer aux dynamiques d'une production écrite où s'entrecroisent apprentissages et créativité.

Cette initiative régionale a pris très vite une ampleur nationale. Au bout de six mois, nous avons reçu beaucoup de textes: environ un millier de personnes mobilisées pour écrire dans toute la France, avec 500 textes environ... Des textes personnels, des textes collectifs, des textes écrits à deux, en famille. À tous, nous avons essayé de répondre personnellement ou collectivement pour leur proposer d'entrer dans un réseau d'échange d'écriture. À tous, nous avons proposé d'entrer également dans une démarche de lecture: chacun a reçu à lire le «journal du concours», avec les textes que nous recevions au fur et à mesure.

Soixante textes ont été retenus pour être primés dans différentes catégories: les participants ont reçu en cadeau des livres qui leur permettent de continuer leur aventure d'écriture. Parmi ces 60 personnes, 25 ont été choisies pour un voyage et un séjour à Paris. Un jury d'honneur de l'écriture les attendait pour stimuler, par sa présence, la joie d'avoir écrit et l'effort de continuer à écrire: Azouz Begag, Laabi Abdellatif, Michèle Reverbel. Un «certificat» d'écriture a été remis à chacun et envoyé aux autres gagnants, signé par le président du CLAP, par une représentante de l'Unesco et par un écrivain, Azouz Begag. Émotion de tous, à titres divers, dans cette salle: la prise de parole des personnalités présentes,

l'appel des candidats et la remise des prix, la lecture de certains des textes reçus, la prise de parole des «lauréats»... Écrire est un acte d'amour qu'il fallait aussi célébrer en public: les rêves ont leur théâtre parfois.

LES LEÇONS D'UN CONCOURS D'ÉCRITURE

Après avoir lancé et accompagné cette initiative, il nous fallait réfléchir, essayer de comprendre notre pratique «d'aide à l'écriture» (par le suivi des cours d'alphabétisation, par la formation des formateurs, par le contact direct avec les personnes en difficulté, etc.) et tirer les premières leçons de ce «concours», expliciter aussi quelques-uns des repères théoriques qui l'ont guidé[1].

Un pari

L'apprentissage de la lecture-écriture n'est pas un préalable à la formation, à l'emploi ou à l'action. Au contraire, il accompagne toutes les pratiques d'insertion sociale, culturelle ou économique qui, seules, donnent un sens à l'écrit.

Les illettrés ont des ressources: sortir d'une vision défensive de «lutte» contre un handicap pour agir en fonction de la transformation sociale et de la «promotion» des personnes.

Renouveler les pratiques pédagogiques, permettre aux formateurs et aux apprenants de sortir des exercices de simulation scolaire et de se mesurer aux exigences de la production écrite socialement communicable.

Pour cela, un concours d'écriture pour les personnes qui ne savent pas écrire et une proposition aux adultes qui pensent et qui disent ne pas savoir écrire:

— Vous possédez une expérience intéressante, vous avez des choses à dire;

— Vous êtes en mesure de trouver des moyens pour rédiger un écrit sur cette expérience qui vous est propre. À vous de résoudre les difficultés liées au passage à l'écrit.

En retour, un engagement: celui de publier les textes (*Journal du concours*) et celui de leur donner un prix (c'est-à-dire de la valeur) par des prix réels, même modiques.

Le concours proposé par le CLAP était un espace à géométrie variable dont la configuration, en partie prévue au départ, s'est modifiée en fonction de la dynamique des participants:

— Une dimension verticale, liée à la proposition même du concours, soit écrire, expédier, attendre les résultats d'un comité de lecture, donc d'une sélection, recevoir des prix liés à la lecture-écriture (un voyage, un séjour à Paris ou des livres, un engagement à continuer à lire...)[2];

— Une dimension horizontale, consistant à entrer dans la dynamique relationnelle de la lecture-écriture, c'est-à-dire envoyer son texte, recevoir du courrier, être publié dans le *Journal du concours d'écritures*, lire les textes d'autres auteurs, communiquer avec eux par écrit, etc.[3]

Des enseignements

D'avril à juin 1990, la proposition a été lancée et réalisée: environ 500 textes envoyés d'un peu partout en France, textes écrits à titre personnel ou provenant de groupes ou stages de formation.

S'il y a des leçons à tirer, elles concernent à la fois l'écriture et le statut des participants. *Malgré les difficultés d'écriture, des personnes ont écrit:* il y a là matière à réfléchir sur les barrières, les préalables, les conditions, les progressions pédagogiques souvent invoqués pour ne pas écrire... *Malgré les difficultés socioprofessionnelles, ces personnes ont écrit:* il y a là matière à réfléchir car, par ce concours ou par mille autres propositions, des personnes se sont senties autorisées à parler, à écrire, se sont senties reconnues, appréciées, écoutées (voir les nombreux témoignages reçus). Ces personnes ont parlé d'elles-mêmes ou des questions qui leur tiennent à cœur[4].

Elles ont écrit... Oui, c'est possible

Écrire, même si on ne sait pas bien écrire, c'est possible. Et le travail n'a pas été mince: premier texte, corrections, envoi par la poste, réponse, lecture du courrier, discussion, échange; le *Journal du concours d'écritures* arrive, des textes publiés, des textes à lire, d'autres textes à écrire, etc. Un millier de personnes (que nous appelons analphabètes ou illettrés) ont osé écrire: elles n'ont pas attendu de bien savoir écrire, d'avoir terminé leurs cours.

Qui sont-elles?

— Une très grande majorité de femmes (reflet d'un statut? reflet de la situation des cours d'alphabétisation?).

— Âge: en majorité entre 20 et 40 ans (mais aussi un très fort pourcentage de 50 à 60 ans et des gens de plus de 60 ans... jusqu'à 86 ans! et... quelques moins de 20 ans).

— Origine ethnique (dans l'ordre d'importance): en très grande majorité des personnes originaires du Maghreb, ensuite du Portugal, du Sud-Est asiatique, des Français, des gens d'Afrique noire et de Turquie, d'Amérique latine, et divers Européens pour finir.

Caractéristiques particulières?

— La majorité des personnes ont rédigé leur écrit soit dans des cours d'insertion sociale dans les quartiers, soit à titre personnel.

— Ensuite viennent des personnes participant à des actions à visée professionnelle ou inscrites dans des Ateliers pédagogiques personnalisés (APP) ou dans des actions particulières du type Crédit formation individualisé (CFI).

— Suivent des personnes fréquentant des lieux sociaux divers (maison des jeunes, maison pour tous, centres sociaux, etc.).

— Puis des personnes vivant dans des milieux particuliers: handicapés mentaux, handicapés physiques, milieu psychiatrique, gitans, bénéficiaires du revenu minimum d'insertion (RMI), prisonniers.

— D'ex-stagiaires des cours d'alphabétisation, pour finir.

Comment s'y sont-elles prises pour écrire?

On peut répondre: *pour écrire, même si on ne sait pas bien écrire, il y a mille façons de faire.* Il n'est pas question de progressions linéaires ou de méthodes spéciales, il est question d'oser entrer dans l'écriture.

Une première étape: dépasser la peur, oser tracer sur une feuille blanche, donner une forme à ses idées... Et puis, composer avec l'orthographe, les règles de grammaire, le problème de la lisibilité... Et puis, communiquer, envoyer à d'autres, recevoir une réponse, établir un circuit et des réseaux... Et puis, continuer, améliorer, etc.

Beaucoup de textes, il est vrai, sont sortis des cours ou des stages de formation et portaient la marque de la création collective: c'est le reflet du fait que le public est nombreux à ces activités, et le reflet de la façon de travailler des formateurs. Un démarrage nécessaire, qui en vaut un autre.

Beaucoup de textes étaient très descriptifs, portaient sur la situation de chômeur ou de stagiaire d'un cours, ou sur le départ du pays natal. Un déclencheur important pour écrire, pour s'y mettre... Un parmi d'autres.

Dans tous les textes reçus, nous avons découvert six catégories, qui nous donnent une idée de la variété des chemins que l'on peut prendre pour écrire, quand on ne sait pas bien écrire; variété des approches, variété des itinéraires personnels:

— Les débuts de l'écriture.

Des traces, des signatures, des cris, des couleurs, parfois des dessins, une marque personnelle sur une page, de petites phrases balbutiantes, une plume hésitante...

— L'écriture avec d'autres.

Un texte rédigé collectivement, un texte avec des petits bouts écrits par chacun, des productions fignolées avec photos, sur ordinateur, grands formats, affiches, petites brochures artisanales, collages et dessins, avec chaque fois la marque de leurs auteurs...

— L'écriture par d'autres.

Je me fais aider, en famille, par mes enfants, par mes grands enfants, par mon mari, ma voisine. Écrit à plusieurs mains: qui tape à la machine, qui saisit sur ordinateur, qui corrige quelque faute, qui retranscrit intégralement un texte soumis à la correction par la suite. Et parfois on se fait aider par le formateur ou la formatrice aussi...

— L'écriture qui se construit.

Des petits textes sont rédigés, quelques lignes ou une page se sont construites, il y a de la suite dans les idées et dans le texte, je parle de moi, de mon départ du pays, je décris ma situation actuelle, je me présente, je parle de ce que je vois autour de moi...

— L'écriture qui décolle.

Je prends de la distance, un peu de hauteur, je donne forme à des sentiments, des impressions, des réflexions, il y a de la poésie dans l'air, ma plume s'envole, j'ai quelque chose sur le cœur à mettre sur papier...

— L'écriture qui libère.

J'ai beaucoup de choses à dire, des angoisses et des joies personnelles, des événements qui me provoquent... et la plume ne suit pas toujours, un peu maladroite, beaucoup de fautes, ce

n'est pas vraiment comme ça, mais j'ai envie de dire, d'écrire, je me libère en écrivant, même si ce n'est pas parfait.

Et certains, après avoir travaillé leur premier texte, sont passés d'une catégorie à une autre: l'important, c'est de savoir qu'il n'y a pas qu'un seul chemin, qu'il y a plusieurs registres sur lesquels on peut jouer pour entrer en écriture et y avancer.

Sur quoi ont-elles écrit?

Si on ne sait pas bien écrire, mais qu'on a quelque chose à dire, eh bien, on y va. *La technique de l'écriture n'est pas un frein pour quelqu'un qui veut essayer de dire «je»*, pour quelqu'un qui veut lancer un message aux autres (concours d'écriture ou pas).

Il n'y avait pas de thème proposé. Ce qui apparaît à la première lecture (mais il faudrait certainement approfondir davantage), ce sont ces quelques thèmes, par ordre d'importance:

— Désir d'apprendre, de savoir lire et écrire (des oppositions thématiques reviennent d'une manière significative: ombre/lumière, nuit/jour, marcher/ne pas marcher);

— Récit de vie, récit d'émigration, conditions actuelles de vie;

— Solitude, tristesse, abandon, détresse;

— Messages d'amour, d'affection (et un tout petit peu d'érotisme, parfois);

— Rêves poétiques sur le pays, sur la maison, sur l'environnement, et aussi sur des sentiments et des passions intérieures;

— Réflexions sur l'actualité (situation mondiale, racisme, paix);

— Un cri, une trace, une signature personnelle («Je suis contente d'écrire parce que je crie mon histoire... Je voudrais prendre un livre dans mes mains... Youpi, je suis contente, Fatima...»).

Des remarques

Le problème du «passage à l'écrit» apparaît, à première vue, comme l'obstacle majeur. Il est très souvent mis en avant par les formateurs («Ils ne savent pas écrire, c'est trop difficile, ils n'y arriveront pas... Écrire, c'est pas pour eux... C'est trop tôt, ils commencent à peine...»). Il est très souvent intériorisé et exprimé par les auteurs eux-mêmes («Je ne sais pas écrire, il faut pouvoir bien écrire, et si je fais des fautes, et puis ce n'est pas beau... Écrire, c'est pas pour moi...»).

Qu'est-ce qui fait obstacle au passage à l'écrit[5] ?

Le plus souvent, ces attitudes renvoient aux conceptions suivantes :

— Conception de la langue et de l'apprentissage — la langue comme « mise en mots » (à l'oral ou à l'écrit) — d'un « déjà là » de la pensée, des événements. L'écrivain mettrait en texte des événements que, préalablement, il « aurait sous les yeux » (comme le peintre avec un modèle sous les yeux).

Les difficultés que connaissent certains adultes dans la rédaction de textes nous font plutôt opter pour une explication opposée : la langue n'est pas un instrument dont la personne ferait l'apprentissage d'abord, pour pouvoir « communiquer » par la suite avec l'environnement. La personne s'organise en apprenant, la personne s'organise par la langue et dans la langue.

— Conception des « apprentis » : il y aurait des personnes qui ne « savent pas » et qui, un beau jour, grâce à une bonne méthode, une bonne progression, un bon entraînement technique, « savent ».

Non, j'apprends en faisant, j'apprends en parlant, j'apprends en écrivant. Ce n'est pas l'expérience qui organise l'expression, mais l'expression qui organise l'expérience[6]. Je ne retiens, je ne mémorise que ce que j'ai le projet de réutiliser[7].

— Conception de l'« écriture ». La lecture et l'écriture seraient une affaire de combinatoire, de méthode analytique ou syllabique pour certains, une affaire d'approche globale pour d'autres. Nous connaissons tous les batailles autour de ces méthodes pédagogiques, qui portent les noms des livres qui sont très souvent utilisés dans les cours.

Il faut rendre hommage à l'Association française pour la lecture (AFL) en particulier (et à d'autres auteurs français et canadiens) pour avoir mis en avant les démarches essentielles pour la lecture, liées à la recherche du sens, aux hypothèses, à l'anticipation, à la communication. Nous ne reviendrons pas sur ces démarches ; nous voulons juste souligner l'importance de la socialisation et de la communication pour le passage à l'écrit : rendre les gens « producteurs et destinataires » d'écrits.

On apprend à écrire parce qu'on a quelque chose à dire à quelqu'un. On apprend à lire parce qu'on s'intéresse à ce que les autres ont bien pu écrire, etc. Apprendre à écrire en écrivant, en situation réelle. Apprendre à lire en lisant, dans les situations réelles...

> «Ce que l'on observe lorsqu'un adulte éprouve des difficultés à s'exprimer, que ce soit par oral ou par écrit, ce sont les traces, les cicatrices parfois, de ses apprentissages premiers tant dans la famille qu'à l'école. Les démêlés avec le système linguistique ne sont souvent que les manifestations de surface d'une difficulté à prendre la parole, au sens de s'autoriser un discours en première personne[8].»

Le pari du concours nous a bien montré que des personnes, beaucoup de personnes, ont osé dire «je» en prenant une plume et un crayon pour écrire. Reste probablement, après ce «je» dit pour soi-même, à approfondir un «je» social, à travers l'échange d'écrits, qui est une des retombées importantes de ce concours.

— Un réseau d'écriture et de lecture est en train de se tisser: on continue à écrire au CLAP, on commence à s'écrire réciproquement au sujet de tel ou tel texte publié dans le *Journal du concours*; on va à la rencontre de ceux qui ont écrit dans une même ville ou dans une même association.

— Des réalisations locales prennent forme: un journal de quartier, un journal de cours, un journal de l'association, et il est possible d'échanger ces réalisations d'une ville à l'autre, d'un quartier à l'autre, d'une association à l'autre.

— Des relais régionaux et locaux s'organisent: Toulouse a célébré le concours d'écriture par la remise d'un prix spécial Midi-Pyrénées; Marseille et Nice se préparent à éditer les textes; Grenoble, Lyon, Saint-Étienne envisagent des «rendez-vous de l'écriture» entre les personnes qui ont écrit, qui ont voyagé, et celles qui entrent maintenant dans l'aventure. D'autres associations ont fêté à leur façon la réussite des candidats au concours et envisagent de poursuivre cette recherche sur l'écriture. La région Rhône-Alpes va promouvoir un concours régional d'écriture. Pour 1991 l'initiative se poursuit sur le plan national et dans plusieurs régions de France.

— Le *Journal du concours* va continuer à être le lien permanent entre tous ceux qui osent écrire: y seront publiés régulièrement les textes reçus pour le concours. Le journal servira de base pour les échanges en famille, en stage. Il est même devenu un support pédagogique pour les apprentissages. Peut-être arriverons-nous à éditer une très belle brochure qui puisse valoriser l'effort d'écriture ainsi réalisé par de nombreux exclus de l'écrit.

L'apprentissage de l'écriture est essentiellement centré sur la conformité à une norme sociale et, disons-le, très souvent scolaire. D'où, pour ce concours, une infinité de questions qui nous étaient posées : « Mais, l'orthographe ?... Et les fautes, faut-il les corriger ?... Je peux réécrire son texte ?... Je le mettrai au propre moi-même... C'est pas beau, comment faire ? », etc.

Et de voir que « lorsque le texte ne répond pas à des exigences extérieures trop précises (correspondance administrative, rapport d'activité, exercices ciblés sur des techniques, ou même genre trop précis : nouvelle, roman, etc.), les sujets écrivants forgent eux-mêmes leurs repères, leurs contraintes, leurs normes ». « Écrire devient véritablement travailler sur soi, sur sa manière de penser et de vivre le monde[9]. » Cette recherche de normes personnelles n'est sans doute pas étrangère à la multiplicité des genres choisis : qui s'est lancé dans la poésie, qui a essayé un récit de vie, qui a composé une chanson, qui a écrit une lettre, qui a fait une petite histoire du passé, qui a fait un commentaire de l'actualité, qui a osé une réflexion philosophique, qui a lancé un message de tristesse ou de bonheur, qui a composé un conte, qui a reformulé des proverbes, etc. C'est comme si chacun avait travaillé son texte en fonction de ses représentations de la « chose » écrite, et en fonction des mots qui lui venaient du cœur, de son être profond... (Sans minimiser, bien entendu, le poids des stéréotypes, aussi, que chacun peut porter en soi sur ces genres littéraires et le poids de la négociation avec son formateur et son groupe de travail éventuel.) Mais la marque personnelle est évidente dans tous les textes reçus. L'orthographe ou les fautes n'ont plus été un critère déterminant de validité du texte écrit. Chacun a négocié les règles de son texte.

D'où le rôle important d'un « tiers », d'un accompagnateur. Ce qui revient souvent, ce sont les questions : « Est-ce que ça va ? Est-ce que c'est bien correct ? Tu comprends ? C'est lisible ?... » La confiance dans le formateur, forte, parfois illimitée, fait plaisir, et fait peur aussi : « Quel chemin à parcourir pour que l'auteur accepte que parler, écrire, c'est toujours négocier avec l'impossible adéquation de soi à soi, de soi aux autres... écrire c'est toujours accoucher de soi dans la souffrance... mais aussi dans le plaisir[10]. » Une participante au concours, M^me^ Djellouli, a bien décrit cela par une comparaison avec l'accouchement : « Je le ressens depuis que j'écris comme un accouchement... douloureux et merveilleux. Il est difficile d'écrire sur moi et aussi d'être lue. Merci pour vos encouragements. »

Des zones d'ombre et des propositions

Lier l'apprentissage de l'écriture à un concours d'écriture n'est pas chose aisée : nous risquons de faire naître le syndrome de la « star » et de faire trotter dans les esprits la possibilité d'une carrière d'écrivain, avec publication, diffusion, *Apostrophes* et célébrité.

La motivation est nécessaire pour écrire, la valorisation est également souhaitable, mais il faut assurer la dynamique des réseaux d'échange de communications écrites et ne pas encourager les rêves impossibles, déjà présents chez certains participants.

C'est probablement dans les retombées concrètes, dans les différentes localités et groupes de formation, que l'aventure peut continuer et se consolider.

Un premier risque est apparu, celui de travailler essentiellement dans les groupes, pour des créations collectives. Si cette démarche d'écrire «avec» d'autres est une façon possible d'accéder à l'écriture, elle ne peut suffire et se poursuivre indéfiniment. Écrire est un acte éminemment personnel et doit amener à trouver son propre chemin, sa propre trace et sa propre parole, qui, elle, va s'inscrire dans un processus d'échange réciproque et de réseaux d'écriture, au sein d'un groupe en formation, ouvert sur l'extérieur.

Un deuxième risque est celui de trop compter sur les stéréotypes que chacun peut avoir de l'écriture et de les renforcer: «J'aime écrire des poèmes, je n'écris que des poèmes... Je me présente et je raconte ma vie... Je décris ce qui se passe dans le stage... Je parle de mon pays...» Découvrir des formes et des contenus différents d'écriture est aussi une façon d'avancer et d'apprendre... Comparer, confronter, essayer une autre voie, m'y risquer.

Deux grands écueils à éviter: le premier cri, le premier jet n'est pas forcément l'objet précieux qu'il faut à tout prix vénérer. Si écrire, c'est un chemin, ce chemin est jalonné de remarques, de corrections, de reprises, dues au lecteur de mon premier texte. Ce texte est parfois beau et fini, il est le plus souvent à améliorer, à peaufiner. Et en même temps, la peur de la faute peut nous paralyser, l'observance des règles «canoniques» de l'écriture peut freiner ou même rendre impuissant. Les soucis orthographiques et syntaxiques trouvent leur place au fil du jeu réciproque de la lecture et de l'écriture pour aboutir à un texte lisible et communicable.

Le troisième risque réside dans l'attitude du pédagogue, du formateur. «J'aimerais avoir quelqu'un pour m'aider à écrire»: très souvent la demande nous a été faite. Et, en même temps, des formateurs ont réagi: «Mais, ce n'est pas possible... Ils ne savent pas écrire... Ils sont encore en train d'apprendre... Ils vont faire beaucoup de fautes... Ce n'est pas pour eux... Comment vais-je faire?» La médiation négative des formateurs n'est pas à négliger. Ce sont souvent eux qui ont le pouvoir d'ouvrir ou de fermer la porte, de soulever des montagnes de difficultés ou d'aplanir le chemin d'une aventure.

Chaque formateur est probablement renvoyé à sa propre pratique, à la façon dont il réfléchit sur sa pédagogie. Est-ce qu'il est prêt pour un travail un peu déstabilisant? Peut-il repérer ce que sont ses propres rapports à l'écriture? Est-ce qu'il sait se situer en médiateur-accompagnateur d'écriture pour d'autres? Des témoignages positifs nous incitent à dire qu'il faut vraiment être soi-même, d'abord, amant de l'écriture. Et, ensuite, chacun aura besoin de l'autre.

Des démarches pédagogiques intéressantes sont apparues, à travers les témoignages écrits des formateurs, quand ils ont pris le pari de l'écriture, sans peur de s'engager un peu hors des sentiers battus. La médiation positive des formateurs s'enclenche quand ils prennent eux-mêmes le risque de l'écriture, et quand ils se situent précisément en tant que «lecteurs» d'un texte produit et «accompagnateurs» d'un texte à produire.

Quoi faire?

La question est ouverte, mais quelques jalons sont posés:

— Des lieux d'écriture: si l'écriture s'inscrit dans une dynamique de créativité et d'expression personnelle, pour les non-écrivants, pour les peu-écrivants, les mal-écrivants, des «lieux» sont à imaginer où l'on puisse fabriquer de l'écriture, polir son texte, corriger, revoir sa rédaction, se comparer aux autres, se mesurer aux normes, progresser dans l'expression de ses idées, ses sentiments, ses projets. Un peu partout, dans les associations, dans les centres de formation, dans les bibliothèques, dans les permanences diverses (pour l'emploi, pour les enfants, pour les adultes, etc.), il nous faut proposer des «ateliers» pour écrire, s'exprimer et il nous faut trouver la pédagogie adéquate.

— Des accompagnements d'écriture: le formateur sera de plus en plus celui qui aide à l'expression, celui qui facilite le travail, celui qui réagit en lecteur d'un texte, celui qui met en contact avec d'autres auteurs, celui qui ouvre aux trésors de l'écriture, celui qui accompagne vers les lieux de l'écriture et de la lecture, celui qui socialise des textes personnels, celui qui valorise, celui qui souffre avec l'auteur pour rendre un texte intelligible et communicable.

— Des réseaux d'écriture: la communication n'est jamais à sens unique. Nous savons aujourd'hui combien l'échange de savoirs et d'expériences joue un rôle important dans l'apprentissage. De même, nous apprenons en transmettant aux autres, nous lisons lorsque nous devenons nous-mêmes un peu écrivains. Être reconnus parce que nous sommes lus, être reconnus parce que nous sommes corrigés; d'autres s'intéressent à nous, nous pouvons

communiquer avec d'autres, des gens semblables à nous, ou différents de nous parfois. Cela passe par la production d'écrits relationnels.

EN CONCLUSION

Pour réussir à écrire

Ce qui est déterminant, c'est que les personnes se voient elles-mêmes comme auteurs-scripteurs.

Il est essentiel de mettre l'accent sur la «production» plutôt que sur la «réception» ou la «copie» de modèles ou de règles.

La production d'écrits a souvent lieu dans un réseau de communication (pour des amis, en famille, dans un groupe d'alphabétisation ou un stage de formation, mais aussi pour un public plus large: quartier, ville, etc.).

Les textes produits sont tous liés à une expérience propre (souvenirs, réflexions, sentiments, rêves sur le passé, le présent ou le futur).

Il y a du plaisir, de la joie, même si les difficultés sont nombreuses, et que tout n'est pas résolu d'un seul coup.

Pour continuer à écrire

Un texte valorisant et beau. Chaque écrit a de la valeur, mérite un «prix».

Un texte qu'il faut retravailler, améliorer, car d'autres peuvent lire, réagir, car d'autres écrivent autrement, etc.

Un texte qui doit pouvoir se «socialiser», devenir une activité continue de communication (journaux de quartier, recueil de textes, correspondance avec d'autres auteurs, débordement sur d'autres situations de prise de parole ou d'action dans son milieu).

Si on pense que certaines personnes ne sont pas capables de produire de l'écrit, et si cette supposition est un des moyens utilisés pour laisser ces gens à leur place, la situation idéale serait de les empêcher de produire quelque écrit que ce soit. Si on ouvre un peu la porte, si on croit qu'ils en sont capables, il faut prendre le risque qu'ils entrent dans le «palais».

Il est dangereux de dire que tout ce que les apprenants écrivent est merveilleux, tel que c'est écrit la première fois. Un travail d'atelier (d'affinage, de fabrication, etc.) est nécessaire. On démarre, mais on réécrit, on vérifie, on améliore.

L'écriture est une aventure intéressante, mais qui a ses limites: on ne peut pas faire croire à chacun qu'il sera écrivain. Si écrire, c'est un travail sur soi et sur le monde qui nous entoure, l'aventure peut continuer aussi sous des formes non écrites (prise de responsabilités, création d'association, engagement dans le quartier, nouvelles relations familiales).

Un changement dans le rôle du formateur est déterminant pour la création et l'animation de lieux vivants d'écriture et de «réseaux» intéressants de communication.

Trois suggestions

1. Des «illettrés», des «analphabètes» ont écrit. Nous vous avons proposé un premier voyage dans ce projet et quelques repères.

   Nous retenons que l'écriture peut être un processus qui soulève des questions et donne lieu à l'analyse des situations qui se rapportent à l'expérience propre des adultes en difficulté.

   Comment ce que ces personnes ont écrit, comment la façon dont elles ont écrit peuvent-ils apporter une pierre à l'édifice de la recherche? Quelle part les apprenants peuvent-ils jouer dans l'analyse et la définition de la façon dont ils apprennent? Qu'est-ce que l'écriture pour eux? Comment s'y prennent-ils, dès qu'on leur ouvre la porte et qu'on leur donne la parole?

   Avoir une vue «de l'intérieur»: qu'est-ce que les exclus de l'écrit disent quand ils écrivent eux-mêmes? Et comment s'y prennent-ils?

   À suivre... pour les chercheurs qui veulent saisir la balle.

2. Pour le CLAP, en particulier, ou pour d'autres organismes sensibles à cette démarche: est-il possible d'envisager la création d'un lieu d'édition et de circulation des écrits de ces personnes? Valoriser une expression écrite peut nous stimuler à poser la question aussi de l'édition des textes et de leur diffusion, à l'échelle nationale ou régionale. Nous sommes à la marge, il est vrai, mais il nous faut trouver des moyens qui sont ceux de l'édition et de la diffusion, à la marge des maisons d'édition des circuits habituels, peut-être pas toujours sensibles à ce type de démarche.

3. Pour les écrivants (formateurs et apprenants), serait-il possible, un jour, d'avoir par écrit des pages d'histoire racontée par ceux qui l'ont vécue? L'histoire officielle de l'immigration et du racisme, nous la connaissons, ainsi que les analyses et les interprétations variées. Comment rendre possible l'écriture de l'histoire passée et actuelle par ceux qui l'ont vécue et sont toujours en train de la vivre?

L'ENTRÉE DES EXCLUS DANS LE PALAIS ROYAL DE L'ÉCRITURE

*ÉLOQUENCE DE BÉDOUIN**

À la cour de Baghdad où s'épanouit, pendant toute la grande période abbasside, la plus haute expression de la majesté du pouvoir, du raffinement de la culture, de l'élégance des vêtements seigneuriaux, on vit un jour apparaître un vrai bédouin qui avait fini par convaincre de haute lutte le corps de garde qu'il devait présenter au roi une poésie enchanteresse[11].

On sait d'ailleurs qu'il ne déplaisait pas aux souverains musulmans d'avoir, de temps en temps, des contacts authentiques avec leurs sujets.

Ce fils du désert, à la peau tannée, au regard de feu exultant d'une ferveur sacrée qui éclatait en un flot de gesticulations désordonnées et grandiloquentes, se mit à déclamer un poème où, tout à tour, il comparait le roi au plus courageux des boucs, au plus ardent des béliers, au serpent agile dans ses méandres et ses retournements, capable d'aveugler ses adversaires d'un seul coup de queue, et même au chameau sobre et rapide, vrai modèle d'endurance!

Un tollé général accueillit ce pauvre bouffon outrecuidant.

Les courtisans se voilaient la face. Outrés de tant d'insolence et de vulgarité, ils demandaient le châtiment suprême de ce provocateur pour outrage à la majesté royale.

Seul, le roi, muet, écoutait avec grande attention.

Finalement il donna sa sentence:

« Veuillez amener ce bédouin, le laver, le vêtir de vêtements de choix, lui préparer une chambre au palais et l'admettre à la cour pendant six mois.

« Jusqu'à présent, il n'a connu qu'un univers de boucs, de béliers, de chameaux, de serpents et d'ânes. Sa parole ne saurait se référer à d'autres comparaisons. Mais j'ai prêté l'oreille à sa musique: cette parole est belle. Donnons à ce fils du désert un autre univers et dans six mois, nous le jugerons. »

L'ordonnance royale fut exécutée et donna naissance à un des plus beaux fleurons de la poésie arabe[12].

* Publié dans *Alpha et promotion hebdo — La lettre du CLAP*, n° 91, 21 septembre 1990.

NOTES

1. Les réflexions qui suivent ont servi de base à une communication faite au colloque organisé par le CLAP à Paris les 26 et 27 novembre 1990: «Exclusions de l'écrit et nouvelles dynamiques d'insertion».

2. Cf. *Alpha et promotion hebdo — La lettre du CLAP*, n° 78, 6 avril 1990 (guide d'action).

3. Cf. Supplément à *Alpha et promotion hebdo: Journal du concours d'écritures*, 12 numéros parus de mai 1990 à mai 1991.

4. Cf. Les différents témoignages publiés dans *Alpha et promotion hebdo*, dans *CLAP Info Rhône-Alpes*, dans le *Journal du concours d'écritures*.

5. Je dois beaucoup, sur ces questions, à l'article de Christine Revuz, «Moi, écrire?... Je...», publié dans la revue *Éducation permanente*, n° 102, avril 1990.

6. Citation de mémoire de Bakhtine.

7. Citation d'après une conférence de Philippe Meirieu.

8. Christine Revuz, *loc. cit.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. Inutile de préciser que cette entrée à l'esbroufe dans le palais, en dehors des séances publiques d'information du souverain où le roi prend traditionnellement plaisir à ausculter son peuple, est assez éloignée du protocole en usage pour les visiteurs, même de classe moyenne, que nous décrit Jahiz.

12. Conte tiré de *Traditions algériennes*, Paris, G.P. Maisonneuves et Larose, 1979, p. 145.

DES TACTIQUES D'ALPHABÉTISATION DANS LE MOUVEMENT ASSOCIATIF

Jean-Paul Hautecœur

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Pendant quelques jours d'octobre 1991, presque tous les auteurs des études précédentes se sont rencontrés à Namur, en Belgique, en séminaire, presque en retraite fermée[1]. Le but immédiat de la rencontre était de finir le livre ensemble. Puis, de fêter le bel ouvrage!

Mais l'événement était trop singulier pour le réduire à une conclusion et le transformer déjà en une fête. D'autres personnes, d'autres associations y participaient. Et les «auteurs» n'étaient pas seulement venus pour «incarner» leur propre partie de la table des matières. On avait autre chose à faire: chercher à dépasser les particularités des associations locales et nationales pour donner à ce mouvement une identité internationale, chercher sur quel terrain collaborer pour consolider les actions locales et mettre sur pied des actions plurinationales[2].

Est-il possible de parler d'un mouvement associatif au singulier dans le domaine de l'alphabétisation? Est-ce encore ainsi qu'on nomme l'ensemble de ses actions? Qu'était-il possible de faire, en association informelle internationale, pour renforcer ce mouvement?

C'est de cette recherche qu'il sera question dans ce dernier chapitre. La première partie rassemble l'introduction de la rencontre et sa conclusion: qui y participait, quelles attentes étaient formulées et sur quels projets elle s'est achevée. La deuxième partie est consacrée aux bilans contrastés des différentes associations et à l'analyse des conjonctures nationales dans lesquelles s'inscrivent les actions. La troisième précise les représentations actuelles de l'alphabétisation dans le mouvement associatif.

Dans le discours, des mots clés sont repérables qui s'agglomèrent en grappes de significations, qui s'assemblent ou se repoussent en lignes de force pour dessiner la topographie du champ d'action collectif. L'ensemble est imaginaire, mais fait de morceaux d'expérience ou d'histoire réelle et d'une volonté d'agir à neuf. L'étude transversale de ces significations fortes sera l'objet de la conclusion du livre.

Gunther Gehre a signalé, pendant le séminaire, l'importance de la fonction idéologique pour le mouvement associatif, par opposition avec les organisations gouvernementales. Il se pourrait en effet que la principale stratégie de ce mouvement soit dans la recherche d'une position idéologique

forte, alors que ses positions dans le temps et dans l'espace sont avant tout marquées par l'éphémère et par la mouvance, par la mobilité plutôt que l'appropriation du terrain, par la pragmatique tactique en zones moindrement balisées plutôt que par les stratégies offensives lourdes d'éradication universelle de l'analphabétisme...

On n'aura donc pas trouvé dans *ALPHA 92* de stratégie d'action du mouvement associatif pour combattre l'analphabétisme, au sens où on l'entend dans les discours autorisés. On aura découvert, plutôt, des expériences locales, des expérimentations d'association sur des «terrains vagues», des recherches-actions au lieu de programmes et de «dispositifs» nationaux, de bons coups mais aussi de bonnes doses d'autocritique. La seule stratégie commune de ce mouvement serait la recherche discursive, idéologique, utopique: lire et dire le monde pour le transformer, ou, plus modestement, créer des espaces libres pour pouvoir échanger des paroles, des savoirs, des symboles que sont les écrits.

Tous les auteurs, ou presque, ont fait référence à Paulo Freire, qui a nommé avec un très grand pouvoir de conviction la force de ce combat le «rêve possible», et son lieu l'action culturelle en terrain insoumis. José Luis Corzo et Julio Lancho font aussi référence à Lorenzo Milani, dont la pédagogie commençait par une inversion (subversion) des valeurs: voir l'analphabétisme à l'opposé d'où on le montre, dans les classes dominantes «incultes», en particulier à l'école. Puis recommencer par le plus urgent: l'alphabétisation des éducateurs...

Nous en sommes là: à l'action culturelle expérimentale solidaire — on dit aujourd'hui «en partnership» (une embarcation de partenaires!) — dans le jeu de l'inversion des valeurs, là où une inversion radicale a déjà été imposée, l'exclusion. Les participants au séminaire se sont quittés sur la recherche d'un autre langage et d'autres conditions sociales, matérielles, mentales pour mieux accueillir paroles et savoirs des exclus. Cette conclusion du livre reflètera, je le souhaite, l'esprit et la lettre de la rencontre.

UN SÉMINAIRE: ENTRÉE, SORTIE

Une variété d'associations

Qui s'est présenté au séminaire de Namur? Quel était le profil des associations? Sans chercher à construire une classification savante, on peut distinguer utilement les diverses associations par: leurs fonctions, leurs publics, leur partenariat, leurs localisations, leur organisation en rapport avec les pouvoirs publics nationaux ou régionaux, leurs messages, etc. La diversité et les différences marquées aideront à ne pas tenter de reconstruire un discours monotone et à ne pas uniformiser un mouvement fait de positions distinctes, qui n'est dirigé par aucun commandement intégré.

— Il y a des associations de fait, à la vie très courte, ou peu longue, toutes les autres étant déclarées ou constituées en sociétés, destinées à durer. Le «pool» d'organisations gouvernementales et non gouvernementales de S. Gregório, au Portugal, ainsi que le réseau européen coordonné par le CUFCO* d'Angers, en France, dont la participation change chaque année à l'occasion de ses rencontres, sont du premier type.

— Si les deux associations portugaises sont majoritairement composées de représentants d'organisations gouvernementales, on ne peut simplement les réduire à une coordination de services publics où «figurent» des organisations locales. L'autonomie des équipes de terrain y est essentielle, comme l'association avec des partenaires locaux, individus et organisations. Mais les deux projets sont nés d'une décision programmée. Une fois le programme triennal ou quinquennal terminé, les budgets sont en principe taris et les associations sont dissoutes.

— Le degré d'autonomie à l'égard de l'État varie considérablement. En Flandre, un réseau d'associations déclarées sans but lucratif est entièrement sous la tutelle d'un ministère. Son organisation a fait l'objet d'un décret. Dans la Communauté française de Belgique, le réseau associatif occupe pratiquement tout le terrain de l'alphabétisation, mais le statut de travail des employés et leur formation s'inscrivent dans des politiques gouvernementales. En Irlande comme dans le cas de WABET** en Écosse, l'autonomie est presque complète, à l'exception de subventions peu contraignantes. En France, l'AFER*** est bien tout à fait autonome, et même autogérée, mais une grande partie de son financement provient de «dispositifs» nationaux de formation contraignants. Les trois associations québécoises présentes sont relativement autonomes, comme leurs homologues belge francophone, irlandaise et écossaise, mais sont soumises aux pressions d'un programme national uniforme et de pouvoirs scolaires locaux et régionaux tentaculaires.

— De ce degré d'autonomie dépend en grande partie le budget des organisations. Les unes sont, semble-t-il, à l'aise, stables, «super-équipées» et ne comptent pas le temps des communications téléphoniques internationales. D'autres demandent qu'on renvoie les appels et vivent en dessous du seuil de la pauvreté, par exemple, le réseau NALA****, en Irlande, et la Jarnigoine, à Montréal.

* Centre universitaire de formation continue, de l'Université d'Angers.

** Whitfield Adult Basic Education Trust, à Dundee.

*** Action-Formation-Étude-Recherche, à Lille.

**** National Adult Literacy Association.

— Il existe des associations régionales ou nationales, qui coordonnent un réseau d'organisations locales, et des associations locales, qui offrent des services de première ligne, et qui peuvent aussi être des associations d'associations (WABET, par exemple).

— Toutes les associations ne s'inscrivent pas dans la formation en alphabétisation. En tout cas, pas exclusivement, comme au Portugal, où il s'agit de projets de développement intégré. Pas vraiment, comme en Écosse et en Flandre, où l'on parle d'éducation de base. Bien peu, comme à l'AFER, où l'on fait de la formation personnalisée. Seulement un peu, comme à l'UFCM*, une boîte performante de formation tous niveaux, tous publics.

— Enfin, les associations se distinguent par leurs lieux d'action et leurs publics. Leur action se déroule dans les communautés où elles travaillent, dans leurs propres locaux ou, faute de mieux, dans des locaux publics mis à leur disposition par les municipalités, les établissements scolaires, etc. Leurs publics peuvent être uniques ou multiples, volontairement hétérogènes ou homogènes, «ghettoïsés» ou dispersés. Mais dans leur grande majorité, les associations s'investissent et cherchent à s'enraciner dans un espace particulier, «local» (un quartier, une unité de HLM**), ou dans une communauté sociologique, culturelle de dimension variable (les femmes, les immigrants ou les jeunes, d'une part, une communauté gitane, un village, un quartier ségrégué, d'autre part).

Le tableau est assez contrasté, mais il est loin d'intégrer toutes les organisations qui s'occupent d'alphabétisation. Beaucoup de types particuliers d'associations n'étaient pas représentés dans ce séminaire, dont l'une des caractéristiques était d'être majoritairement francophone, que ce soit en ce qui a trait à la langue d'origine des participants ou à la langue seconde.

Comment les participants avaient-ils été sélectionnés? Principalement d'après deux critères: la qualité reconnue de leur travail et des personnes qui le font — l'image de marque de l'association —, avec un accent sur la recherche-action et l'innovation et l'action à côté/en dehors du champ pédagogique, qui suppose aussi des pratiques expérimentales, en marge du «mainstream» de la lutte contre l'illettrisme. À cette liste s'ajoutent des idéologues concrètement engagés dans le mouvement associatif et des coordonnateurs de réseaux nationaux et internationaux.

Parmi la trentaine de personnes présentes, une quinzaine avaient accepté de rédiger, avec ou sans ma collaboration, une monographie sur

* Unité de formation Cannes Méditerranée.

** Habitations à loyer modique.

leur travail de terrain ou un article exposant une recherche-action où elles étaient engagées.

Les attentes

Quelques tendances à peine perceptibles sont décelables à l'entrée, alors qu'on n'a pas encore eu le temps de se présenter, de se reconnaître, d'échanger, de s'attirer, se repousser, s'isoler, s'affronter...

— L'une concerne la recherche d'une «approche intégrale», ou la façon de réussir dans l'association avec les secteurs forts, le public et le privé, tout en préservant son identité. Les deux termes clés sont «renforcer» et «partenariat». Ils s'attirent, mais l'identité et l'autonomie associative sont en jeu. Il est clair qu'on ne peut agir efficacement et étendre son rayon d'action dans l'isolement, avec des moyens précaires. Les interlocuteurs gouvernementaux ne sont plus les seuls partenaires possibles ni même les partenaires privilégiés. En se concentrant sur l'échelle locale et régionale, on doit élargir le partenariat et arriver à s'associer avec les secteurs forts: l'économique, le financier, le politique, les élus municipaux, les services publics, le secteur associatif, l'université, etc. Si l'objectif sur le plan collectif est la lutte contre l'exclusion, il faut se donner les moyens de l'atteindre. Toute la société est concernée. Elle doit faire plus...

— À partir des deux mots clés précédents, «renforcer» et «partenariat», se dessine une autre série d'attentes qui s'expriment dans les mots «liberté», «alternative», «contrepoids», «spécificité», «autonomie». La recherche d'efficacité dans l'action, de présence, d'association plus solide avec différents partenaires suppose une position autonome face aux pouvoirs publics et aux «pouvoirs forts». La question a été formulée ainsi: «Comment s'associer avec les pouvoirs publics tout en gagnant de l'autonomie?» Ou: «Jusqu'où ne faut-il pas aller pour demeurer innovateur et préserver son identité?»

— Une autre position est celle d'un mouvement à bout de souffle, qui n'aurait bientôt d'autre choix que l'intégration au secteur public ou l'abandon d'une lutte trop épuisante. Comment s'en sortir? Faut-il encore se battre pour la préservation d'un statut associatif difficilement reconnu, pour défendre les acquis, pour gagner un soutien politique qui n'assure que la survie? Pour une cause aux résultats incertains, entre autres parce que les moyens diminuent, que les partenaires sont introuvables et que l'énergie des militants est au plus bas. Ou comment faire valoir l'importance d'un mouvement associatif renforcé dans les actions

socioculturelles de lutte contre la pauvreté quand ces actions ont été institutionnalisées et que l'investissement public y est déjà jugé trop élevé?

— Il y un faisceau d'attentes dirigées plutôt sur le travail pratique d'alphabétisation. Quels sont les moyens de rendre les apprenants plus autonomes, responsables de leurs propres apprentissages? Comment évaluer le travail de façon à pouvoir en communiquer les résultas de façon plus convaincante? Que faire d'autre pour stimuler la mobilisation et l'engagement de nouveaux partenaires? Comment articuler l'alphabétisation dans un programme intégré de développement? Comment décloisonner le travail d'alphabétisation et l'éducation en général?

— Il est, pour beaucoup, exceptionnel de participer à un séminaire international sur le thème des expériences d'alphabétisation dans le mouvement associatif. L'événement arrive dans une conjoncture internationale où plusieurs variables sont partagées: la croissance de l'exclusion, la recherche d'autres stratégies d'action que l'«alphabétisation ponctuelle», la tendance à l'institutionnalisation des associations dans le contexte de nouvelles législations sur l'éducation de base. C'est donc l'occasion d'apprendre, de découvrir, d'échanger, de faire connaître, de réfléchir les expériences locales dans un exercice d'échanges entre pays et entre individus.

— Un livre est en chantier, c'est actuellement le seul projet international commun au groupe présent. Comment peut-on l'utiliser, le faire connaître, mieux le diffuser? Mais après... Quel projet commun de recherche-action élaborer pour approfondir cette coopération commencée dans un réseau associatif international? En quoi un organisme comme l'Institut de l'Unesco pour l'Éducation peut-il aider à stimuler l'innovation, la recherche d'une plus grande efficacité des actions?

Telles étaient les attentes du groupe à l'arrivée. Il faut savoir que le menu de la rencontre n'était pas ce «buffet» de questions inédites, que les participants n'ont pas eu le loisir d'organiser à leur gré les échanges. Une grande partie du séminaire était structurée à partir du canevas de la table des matières: exposés, commentaires, questions. Le jeu des questions et réponses ponctuelles fut difficile à insérer dans le peu de temps laissé par l'exercice de traduction. Ce n'est qu'en fin de parcours, et toujours à temps compté, qu'il a été possible d'échanger plus librement et de chercher collectivement ce que nous allions faire par la suite.

Les suites

Ne pas finir le séminaire dans les palabres idéologiques, mais en arriver à la définition de projets d'actions réalistes, localement applicables, tel était l'objectif de sortie.

On a finalement peu parlé du *mouvement associatif* en général, sinon pour remettre en doute son unité, ses consensus et la priorité d'action commune à l'échelle internationale. Les positions sont diverses. Pour certains l'action locale doit avoir priorité. Un autre événement international n'est concevable qu'après un travail local qui le justifierait. Pour d'autres, ce mouvement est trop contradictoire. D'une part, les associations sont souvent en concurrence les unes vis-à-vis des autres. D'autre part, elles ne tiennent pas du tout le même langage. Et comment se donner une plus grande crédibilité, alors qu'on pratique avec un certain plaisir l'autodépréciation, donc en projetant une image fort négative du travail d'alphabétisation?

Deux «épreuves» minimales sont proposées aux associations pour atteindre une plus grande cohérence et «améliorer leur marge de crédit» dans leurs négociations avec les pouvoirs public et privés:

— Reconnaître que l'alphabétisation puisse être une fin en soi, comme exigence légitime dans une société démocratique;

— Donner une image positive du travail d'alphabétisation et des personnes avec qui l'on travaille.

La valeur politique du thème est suffisamment forte pour qu'on l'insère dans les stratégies de développement local, qui peuvent être renforcées par l'appui international, une valeur politique ajoutée à l'action positive locale ou régionale. À ces conditions nécessaires à l'existence d'un mouvement associatif constructif s'ajoute la proposition d'une recherche commune en vue de l'élaboration d'une charte associative qui serait un moyen de liaison entre une association locale, un réseau régional ou national de lutte contre l'exclusion et un engagement d'envergure internationale (voir en annexe la charte de la CIRAT, de la Communauté française de Belgique).

Une autre proposition est présentée visant à faire le lien à l'échelle internationale entre deux organisations locales: le jumelage, l'association de deux réseaux d'alphabétisation sur le modèle des jumelages entre municipalités. Son but est de créer des conditions d'échanges interculturels entre apprenants, entre formateurs, entre organismes qui ont en commun la même volonté de sortir de la marginalité. L'exemple est donné de Cannes et Namur qui sont deux centres d'attraction sur le plan culturel et qui pourraient créer un réseau d'échange de savoirs et de créations populaires. Deux associations d'alphabétisation travaillent actuellement dans ce sens. Ce projet peut prendre de l'ampleur. Il est coûteux. Comment le financer?

Quant à l'utilité de créer un nouveau réseau d'associations plus structuré, il a été rappelé que plusieurs réseaux existent et que les échanges entre réseaux associatifs pourraient fort bien se faire par les canaux existants. La publication *ALPHA 92*, ainsi que le séminaire de Namur sont une initiative de l'Institut de l'Unesco pour l'Éducation, qui coordonne déjà un réseau international d'échanges. Ce réseau croise le Réseau européen de formation, d'action et de recherche en alphabétisation ainsi qu'un bulletin international de l'Unesco *(Éducation des adultes — Notes d'information)*.

Le groupe présent était avant tout composé d'auteurs rassemblés autour d'un *projet de publication*, et non pas de représentants officiels de regroupements nationaux. Cette réunion fermait le livre. Mais il fallait encore en assurer la diffusion et lui trouver une utilité locale pour les associations.

On a proposé de préparer une grille de lecture, à partir des questions traitées pendant le séminaire, pour une utilisation plus pratique des textes dans les groupes de formateurs et d'apprenants. On a proposé que des résumés soient faits et publiés dans les bulletins locaux, pour accélérer la diffusion. On a recommandé que les commentaires des textes soient aussi publiés dans les bulletins locaux, pour activer la distribution. On a recommandé que les commentaires des textes soient aussi publiés (voir note 2); qu'on fasse mieux connaître cette publication dans les pays anglophones (éditée en anglais depuis 1990, elle sera aussi éditée en espagnol en 1992) et qu'on explore les possibilités de publication en portugais; qu'on saisisse l'avantage de sa gratuité pour en assurer une diffusion massive dans les réseaux nationaux.

Le livre peut être aussi un puissant instrument de mobilisation des partenaires sociaux et politiques s'il est accompagné d'une animation. On peut en faire circuler des extraits à l'occasion d'assemblées municipales. Pour mettre à profit sa valeur internationale sur le plan local, il est suggéré d'inviter l'un des auteurs à l'occasion de rencontres de mobilisation ou de formation.

Un thème pour la prochaine publication d'*ALPHA* est proposé: *La recherche participative*. Comment faire participer les apprenants à la recherche?

D'ordinaire, une assemblée de ce genre cherche à se doter d'une structure minimale pour se reproduire en un autre lieu; elle réserve un moment pour son organisation; elle instaure un rythme, des rites; elle engage... On n'a pas donné suite à l'idée de charte du mouvement associatif, de jumelage, d'action positive, ni d'un suivi autre que local à la publication *ALPHA*. Le lieu de l'action est avant tout local.

Mais on a beaucoup parlé d'un autre livre à mettre en chantier, d'*un livre autre*, écrit par les exclus. Les animateurs d'alphabétisation ont passé la balle aux absents. Il a d'ailleurs été proposé que les idées et projets lancés en séminaire soient présentés aux apprenants dans les associations. À eux de décider des suites à donner. Ils sont déjà une communauté internationale: il faut trouver les moyens de faciliter la circulation de leurs écrits, créer des occasions d'échanges en langues étrangères, entre individus et groupes.

C'est le thème de la conclusion du séminaire. S'il faut encore parler de stratégies du mouvement associatif, elles s'expriment dans les *conditions à créer pour qu'une réelle possibilité d'écrire soit facilitée pour les exclus*. Créer un lieu d'édition pour les écrits individuels et collectifs; faire connaître les initiatives et les productions locales; faire circuler les journaux écrits par les apprenants; ouvrir un concours d'écriture entre plusieurs pays, et des pays de langues différentes; faire circuler un panier à livres dans un circuit international; créer des événements d'écriture, de parole, d'images, de musiques, comme une foire au livre, un festival de poésie-vidéo-théâtre populaires...

Stimuler l'expression, la communication, l'échange par une production écrite réelle, dans la vie et non plus dans une simulation pédagogique, suppose encore que les formateurs ou animateurs soient «convertis», «conscientisés». Il arrive qu'ils bloquent l'expression, puisqu'ils ont le pouvoir de décider qui est capable d'écrire, qui est autorisé à écrire. Des séances d'alphabétisation devront être organisées pour les animateurs-éducateurs, comme le recommandait Milani. Cela peut se faire aussi en séminaires, en colloques, à travers des journaux...

Des voix dissidentes, quand même, devant ce projet de chantier d'écriture. Les apprenants ne sont pas là, nous ne pouvons décider à leur place. L'expérience du livre de l'Année internationale de l'alphabétisation, monopolisée par les animateurs, aura été une expérience négative pour l'expression des apprenants. Un concours d'écriture risque de faire la promotion de ses organisateurs plutôt que celle de la parole exclue. Mais aussi, cette mobilisation sur l'écriture des apprenants suppose un long travail de fond avec tous. Le message: «tu peux écrire» passe mal!

Un *axe de circulation des écrits*, pour le panier à livres, a été établi entre Bruxelles, Lille, Lyon, Madrid, Québec, Édimbourg, qui croise le projet de jumelage entre Cannes et Namur et le projet d'un événement de culture populaire.

Un *projet de recherche-action sur le thème de la production écrite des exclus* a été retenu, soutenu par l'Institut de l'Unesco pour l'Éducation. Les coordonnateurs du Collectif d'alphabétisation de Bruxelles, du

CLAP* de Lyon et de l'Institut de l'Unesco se rencontreront pour élaborer ce plan de recherche et chercher des moyens de le mettre en œuvre.

UN BILAN CONTRASTÉ DE L'ALPHABÉTISATION

Le contexte de travail des associations sur le plan national détermine en grande partie les analyses que celles-ci font de leurs difficultés et de leurs résultats. Mais tout aussi déterminante est leur idéologie, ou leur façon de concevoir le travail d'alphabétisation et ses objectifs, qui renvoie elle aussi à l'histoire de chaque mouvement dans son contexte national ou régional particulier.

Les difficultés des associations

En Belgique francophone comme au Québec, les associations sont marquées du même signe que leur public: la pauvreté. L'évaluation des difficultés et des limites du travail d'alphabétisation renvoie en grande partie à la précarité de leurs moyens: personnel sous-qualifié, inexpérimenté, instable, bénévole; permanents débordés, épuisés, découragés; fuite des plus compétents vers des postes plus valorisés et mieux payés. La pauvreté est cause de l'instabilité et de la démobilisation du personnel, et aussi de la difficulté de planifier des activités, de faire des prévisions, des investissements. Dans la région de Namur, une campagne intensive de mobilisation dans la lutte contre l'illettrisme a abouti à la constatation déconcertante qu'on n'était pas capable de satisfaire une demande en croissance. Ou qu'on n'en avait pas les moyens.

Les conditions de travail difficiles communes au Québec et à la Wallonie, auxquels on pourrait ajouter l'Irlande et la Grande-Bretagne dans la présente conjoncture de libéralisme économique, s'inscrivent dans des contextes différents. Les associations wallonnes occupent pratiquement tout le terrain de l'alphabétisation; elles s'appuient sur un large partenariat social; elles sont reconnues des pouvoirs publics et des municipalités; elles sont constituées en réseau avec un mouvement associatif très actif dans la lutte contre la pauvreté. Leur rattachement au secteur de la culture et des affaires sociales serait, selon les coordonnateurs, garant de leur autonomie et de la libre orientation de leur action d'éducation populaire.

Par comparaison, les associations québécoises tentent de survivre dans un contexte plus difficile. Elles n'occupent qu'une petite partie du terrain de l'alphabétisation, souvent dans une position de sous-traitance. Leur partenaire obligé est le réseau scolaire, qui a la légitimité de la mission d'alphabétisation et qui absorbe la plus grande partie des ressources publiques qui y sont consacrées. Considérées comme des organismes d'éducation

* Comité de liaison pour l'alphabétisation et la promotion.

permanente, les associations québécoises voient leur autonomie en éducation populaire réduite dans le cadre d'un programme national unique. Elles ne peuvent plus s'appuyer sur le réseau polyvalent d'organisations autonomes, qui n'a pas survécu à dix ans de restrictions budgétaires et de paupérisation généralisée. Elles n'ont plus d'autre choix, à quelques exceptions près, que de se mettre au service du système scolaire, avec les avantages et les conséquences négatives que cela comporte, conséquences semblables à celles qu'on a connues dans la Belgique néerlandophone.

En Flandre, l'éducation de base a été semi-nationalisée. Les associations sont tenues de suivre un programme administré par le ministère de l'Éducation. Les difficultés décrites par Gunther Gehre ne sont encore qu'appréhendées, mais la comparaison avec l'expérience québécoise les fait paraître tout à fait probables. La coopération intersectorielle des centres locaux n'existe que dans le cas de leurs conseils d'administration. Le travail d'alphabétisation tend à obéir à une logique scolaire: «Une situation à problème doit toujours être isolée et se traduire dans un programme éducatif à durée déterminée [..]. Ce danger d'une scolarisation est réel.» Cela signifie: programmation centralisée, distanciation des apprenants (nommés aussi «clients», comme au Québec), par conséquent marginalisation sinon abandon de l'approche «sociale» de l'alphabétisation au profit de cours en demande, par exemple de cours de langue seconde.

Dans les deux expériences portugaises, les principales difficultés auxquelles se sont heurtées les équipes de terrain sont similaires du fait de la nature interinstitutionnelle des associations. L'action locale est dépendante des traditions des institutions auxquelles elle est attachée, traditions et idéologies qui peuvent être conflictuelles. L'équipe locale est soumise aux rapports hiérarchiques imposés par l'appareil bureaucratique, alors qu'elle recherche les rapports dialogiques sur le terrain. Mais les deux expériences ont aussi montré que la nature institutionnelle des actions n'était pas incompatible avec une action locale autocentrée, ouverte au partenariat avec les organisations locales; également, que le service social peut être mieux préparé à ce type d'action que l'éducation permanente.

L'expérience faite à S. Gregório auprès d'une communauté gitane a particulièrement mis en évidence les difficultés d'ordre culturel majeures d'une action qui ne peut être isolée des rapports de rejet qui existent dans la société entre majorité et minorité. La détermination de l'équipe de terrain et sa méthodologie n'ont pas été suffisantes pour neutraliser ce fait. L'alphabétisation qui s'impose (à l'évidence) au nom des valeurs d'intégration et de développement est considérée par les gitans comme une acculturation, un danger pour la survie de leur groupe. L'opération de changement commandée de l'extérieur a pour effet de renforcer la solidarité du groupe par des attitudes de «résistance au changement», qui sont aussi des manifestations d'affirmation culturelle.

Ce paramètre interculturel fondamentalement conflictuel de S. Gregório peut être transposé au rapport interclasse, qui sépare — sans toujours les opposer — les animateurs et les participants des activités d'alphabétisation. La participation ne peut être forcée, en particulier lorsqu'il s'agit d'un projet éducatif qui n'est généralement pas prioritaire pour les destinataires. Cette valeur même de participation, centrale dans l'idéologie de beaucoup d'associations, n'est pas «naturellement» partagée par les «participants». Des stratégies de déviation des objectifs d'apprentissage, ou même de remplacement des objectifs éducatifs par des services ou par des revendications sociales sont nécessaires pour attirer cette participation. Même dans ce cas, «la difficulté, dit Omer Arrijs, est de dépasser un stade de vente ou d'entraide sociale pour entrer dans une démarche d'éducation populaire ou de formation».

Les rapports animateurs-formateurs/participants-apprenants peuvent être antagonistes. Francesco Azzimonti voit dans le rôle des alphabétiseurs un obstacle possible à l'ouverture et à l'échange de communications écrites. Définissant leurs partenaires comme incompétents, handicapés ou opprimés, les formateurs les ont déclarés inaptes à toute prestation écrite qui ne soit pas canalisée vers l'exercice pédagogique. On comprend qu'un tel lieu ne soit pas considéré comme fréquentable par les nouveaux parias! Il fallait alors s'attendre qu'une des principales difficultés signalée un peu partout par les alphabétiseurs soit définie comme un «problème de motivation». Comme dans le cas des gitans ou de toute autre minorité prolétarisée, l'absence peut être positivement comprise comme un refus de se présenter, en connaissance de cause, et comme le fait que le diagnostic des éducateurs est lu comme une négation construite du savoir et de l'identité désirés. «Les exclus ne viennent pas!» C'est sans doute la difficulté majeure de l'histoire récente de l'alphabétisation, que beaucoup d'associations n'ont pas réussi à résoudre, quel que soit le contexte national[3].

À l'opposé des associations wallonnes et québécoises est le cas d'associations qui dispensent un service public sur le modèle de l'entreprise privée, disposant de moyens jugés suffisants, grâce à une conjoncture nationale favorable (la crise, le chômage!), grâce au partenariat avec de nombreuses organisations régionales et, sans doute, à une «technicité professionnelle reconnue». Les animateurs de l'AFER nomment institutionnalisation la difficulté particulière à cette situation où l'on a mis «trop d'eau dans son vin». La contradiction entre les buts explicites de l'organisme — autonomie, autogestion, auto-apprentissage — et ceux des organisations partenaires — insertion socioprofessionnelle, formation technique — qui ont déterminé le «cahier des charges» déstabilise l'action reconnue comme un simulacre. Si les buts de l'association ne changent pas, l'issue à la contradiction est bien perçue comme l'«autodissolution». Francis Gosset et Didier Andreau ont ajouté oralement ce sous-titre à leur texte: «Jusqu'où il ne faut pas aller dans la volonté de développement!»

Finalement, une difficulté majeure de beaucoup d'associations qui travaillent dans une conjoncture internationale d'écartèlement des sociétés duales et de renflement du pôle de l'exclusion est l'impossibilité de soutenir l'objectif d'alphabétisation quand la demande réelle est d'aide ou de résistance à l'exaspération des conditions quotidiennes de vie. Olívia Oliveira concluait par la nécessité d'un engagement actif dans la société portugaise pour faire respecter et appliquer les droits de l'homme, donc d'un rôle politique «médiateur» à l'extérieur du bidonville. Au WABET, malgré tout l'optimisme et malgré la priorité accordée à l'objectif d'éducation communautaire, on reconnaissait comme une difficulté majeure la dissociation du projet pédagogique des objectifs sociaux d'engagement communautaire. À La Jarnigoine, on passait à une stratégie d'expression globale de la parole des femmes. À l'Alpha Mons-Borinage, on jugeait inévitables les actions multiples d'offre de services et l'organisation politique des réseaux associatifs dans la lute contre l'exclusion. À l'AFER, on trouvait intenable la prestation «technicienne» et la pédagogie d'individualisation de la formation, dont la fonction (à peine admise) est bien d'empêcher la collectivisation et l'organisation de la résistance — «la construction d'une alternative» disaient les auteurs — au sein de ces «ghettos pour demandeurs d'emploi longue durée». Il arrive aussi que ces questions ne soient pas évoquées, du fait d'un militantisme suranné dans la «lutte contre l'analphabétisme» ou d'une professionnalisation bien territorialisée de l'alphabétisation.

Ainsi, le contexte national, la position sur le marché de la formation, le type d'association et de public, le type de rapports qui lient animateurs et participants, la conjoncture internationale (en fait, une crise structurelle du capitalisme mondial) sont autant de facteurs qui rendent compte de l'éventail des difficultés que connaissent les associations dans le travail d'alphabétisation. Ces difficultés font partie du tableau des «résultats», pourtant encourageants, de la plupart des associations, résultats qui ne sont pas toujours ceux auxquels on s'attend.

Les résultats

L'idée est partagée que l'évaluation des résultats de l'alphabétisation communautaire ne peut se confondre avec la mesure des apprentissages individuels, dits techniques, linguistiques ou scolaires. Même au Portugal où l'analphabétisme complet est très répandu et où l'alphabétisation a aussi cet objectif d'apprentissage scolaire (on y délivre des certificats), «l'évaluation doit être faite dans un contexte plus totalisant où l'extension des résultats déborde la mesure de l'apprentissage scolaire» (Olívia Oliveira).

Ce séminaire avait exclu de son thème les questions pédagogiques de l'apprentissage individuel. La plupart des animateurs conçoivent leur travail comme une recherche des conditions réelles — dans la vie — de

communication, d'expression, d'échange, de production de sens, d'identité, de culture et de savoir reconnus, dignes d'être partagés et transmis. En voici deux expressions claires parmi bien d'autres:

> «Sans stratégie d'intervention, l'alphabétisation demeure une coquille vidée de sa substance, une tâche scolaire vouée à l'échec sur tous les plans» (Sylvie Roy).

> «Learning is about creating knowledge (reading the world), strengthening voices that have been silenced (writing who you are) and telling others what you have discovered (reaching an audience)» (Hamilton, Ivanic, Barton)[4].

Les résultats individuels recherchés sont moins dans la performance de l'expression écrite que dans le changement d'attitude, de vision du monde et dans l'engagement dans l'action concrète de développement. On aime citer Paulo Freire: «La connaissance ne se transfère pas, elle se crée dans et par l'action sur la réalité.» Les résultats qu'on peut observer vont des changements imperceptibles, ordinaires, «anecdotiques» de la vie quotidienne à l'organisation politique de plus grande envergure («à la théorie» — Élise de Coster) dans la lutte contre l'exclusion, dans la revendication de droits démocratiques ou même dans l'application d'autres modèles collectifs de développement, en rupture avec les pratiques dominantes (voir Pierre Georis). On ne peut pas appliquer ici, dans ces pratiques de *contre-alphabétisation* en solidarité avec les populations marginalisées, les critères d'évaluation individualisée de l'alphabétisation «dominante», «fonctionnelle», d'«insertion socioprofessionnelle». Voici un exemple tiré de la conclusion de deux années de recherche-action avec les gitans portugais:

— Rendre plus solide le rapport interculturel;

— Donner un sens constructif aux revendications des gitans;

— Chercher à satisfaire les besoins essentiels dans les meilleures conditions;

— Combattre le sentiment d'impuissance;

— Aaménager de meilleures conditions d'apprentissage pour les jeunes, vers une autonomie croissante;

— Faire appliquer les droits de l'homme;

— Travailler dans le sens du développement culturel endogène plutôt que dans le sens de l'intégration.

Dans ce cas comme dans bien d'autres, l'écriture n'est pas évoquée dans les priorités d'action (sauf pour l'instruction des enfants). Les objectifs ont été reprécisés durant l'action, par rectification des «erreurs» initiales, mises au compte de l'ethnocentrisme et de l'ignorance des animateurs. Ceux-ci ont repensé leur rôle en transformant leur pratique de recherche-action en un processus de dialogue interculturel. Les résultats de deux ans d'action intensive? Immenses, même s'il faut recommencer!

Il y a apparemment, dans les auto-évaluations des animateurs, des observations décourageantes du type «cul-de-sac» ou «conscience aiguë des impasses». Les plus exclus ne se présentent pas. Pour ceux qui viennent et qui restent, les services rendus ne changent en rien le rapport d'exclusion, ou même ils le renforcent: «L'alphabétisation délimite et renforce la distance qu'elle prétend combler» (Omer Arrijs). Mais face à ces résultats globaux négatifs, si les difficultés sont ardues, si les objectifs visés ultimement sont, dans le temps subjectivement court de l'action, inaccessibles, beaucoup d'évaluations sont pourtant positives. Un signe infime de changement peut avoir des effets exponentiels, comme le dit cette observation de Madalena Dias:

> «Une partie importante de la population est restée passive, mais elle a commencé à comprendre le mouvement [...] L'adhésion a dépassé les attentes de tous les intervenants. L'existence d'un mouvement insoupçonné est devenue visible. Il a entraîné d'autres actions [...] Il a commencé à produire son propre modèle de participation.»

Des observations semblables sont faites par Blair Denwette à propos de la situation en Écosse, où la stratégie d'implantation dans la communauté a donné les résultats escomptés en ce qui a trait à la participation des individus et des associations locales «avec la communauté» — et même dans l'engagement de certains individus dans le travail d'éducation de base — «par la communauté». Des changements sensibles, visibles, observés, analysés, qui permettent l'objectivation de l'action, la critique des postulats antérieurs, l'expérimentation de nouvelles tactiques, la liaison et l'échange avec des groupes extérieurs, l'organisation de réseaux plus larges de solidarité et d'éducation populaire: toutes les associations en témoignent.

Parmi les conditions de réussite de l'action, outre le principe essentiel de la participation de la communauté, beaucoup d'animateurs soulignent l'importance du facteur temps. La stratégie des petits pas ne donne pas de résultats sensibles dans le court terme. «Les changements sont très lents.» Le travail dans la culture, le développement des échanges langagiers, matériels, géographiques, symboliques dans une communauté et la transformation des rapports entre une communauté et les partenaires extérieurs supposent une planification de trois, cinq ou dix ans, de même qu'une

permanence de l'équipe de terrain et un découpage souple de la séquence des actions. Par exemple, l'enquête de terrain dure, à S. Gregório, tout le temps de l'action. Elle se transforme. Sa fonction traditionnelle de pré-alphabétisation tend à absorber le travail même d'alphabétisation. L'observation participante devient une entrée progressive dans le dialogue réel avec la communauté, une liaison rare, porteuse de projets communs. Cela prend des années pour inverser un rapport d'exclusion incarné là même où on le nie: entre les animateurs et leurs acolytes. Le résultat est à chercher dans ce processus même de transformation des règles de l'échange.

On évalue souvent l'action à l'atteinte des objectifs initiaux. Ici, sa valeur est estimée à leur changement. La qualité recherchée n'est pas dans la technique de l'application des règles de la méthode: elle est dans la souplesse et la malléabilité, dans le fait d'accorder mieux l'action aux circonstances (Olívia Oliveira). À S. Gregório, il est frappant que le vecteur du changement se soit inversé. Pendant longtemps, on a pensé que c'étaient les gitans qui devaient changer. Devant la prétendue «résistance au changement» des gitans, ce sont les animateurs qui ont changé. De l'idée de progrès, ils sont passés à celle de «reconnaissance de la dignité humaine», d'«acceptation» et de «respect» de la différence, de «rencontre» des cultures, d'«information bilatérale», d'«interrelation dialectique», de «dialogue». Cette inversion radicale des valeurs et du sens de l'action d'alphabétisation aura germé durant trois ans. L'affirmation neuve a découvert l'enjeu de l'action culturelle: «Si certains rapports entre les deux cultures ne sont pas reconvertis et contrecarrés, ils risquent de prendre la forme du génocide culturel».

D'où la force de l'argument de Milani, qui était partagé par plusieurs participants au séminaire: l'alphabétisation s'impose d'abord en direction des alphabétiseurs. Sans alphabétisation, ceux-ci risquent d'imposer aux autres leur diktat d'analphabétisme pour longtemps, puisque leur action aura pour effet de renforcer leur propre jugement méprisant plutôt que de changer le sort de leurs victimes.

Une dernière évaluation du travail d'alphabétisation, dans un organisme qui se présente d'abord comme une «école alternative» pour les jeunes qui intègre également l'action communautaire, fera la transition entre la nature des résultats atteints et la remise en question de l'alphabétisation:

> «Les jeunes ont souvent des besoins urgents à combler autres que l'alphabétisation. Si nous reconnaissons des résultats dans notre travail, c'est justement dans la satisfaction des besoins affectifs et sociaux [...] Les deux besoins les plus importants demeurent le travail et les relations sociales et amoureuses, comme pour nous tous d'ailleurs [...] Lire et écrire demeure l'attente la plus vague et la plus difficile à réaliser» (Sylvie Roy).

L'ALPHABÉTISATION AU PLURIEL

Il y a des associations qui étiquettent sans vergogne leur «clientèle» comme analphabète ou illettrée. Cette «clientèle» est constituée d'individus handicapés et dans le besoin à qui faut une aide psychosociale, pédagogique, thérapeutique. L'alphabétisation sera cette action particulière, menée dans un lieu choisi à cette fin, par un personnel qui va des bénévoles aux rééducateurs en passant par les psychologues. Le service de développement des capacités linguistiques cherche à répondre aux demandes pratiques de communication écrite ou de recyclage dans un programme de formation, tout en renforçant chez l'individu l'image de soi et en améliorant ses relations avec son environnement immédiat. On peut qualifier ce type d'action de «psychopédagogique».

D'autres associations ont une approche plus sociale. Les «analphabètes» sont avant tout des exclus, non pas des handicapés mais des gens normaux marginalisés par rapport aux circuits ordinaires des échanges sociaux. Ils forment la classe montante au pôle «perdant» de la société duale. Là, l'alphabétisation est comprise comme une tentative de réinsertion dans les circuits des échanges économiques communautaires, sociolinguistiques, mais aussi comme une tentative d'aide multiple à la solution des problèmes quotidiens liés à la pauvreté. La formation linguistique de base ou d'appoint n'y est pas toujours un service de première ligne. Elle peut être associée à un ensemble de services ou d'actions communautaires «transversales». Le profil type du formateur est l'animateur social de formation diverse, ou encore une équipe interdisciplinaire qui comprend une valence «éducation populaire».

Il y a un troisième type d'associations, dont le rapport avec l'alphabétisation sera plus culturel que social. Pour celles-là, l'analphabétisme est avant tout un attribut accolé par les institutions dominantes ethnocentriques aux minorités et à certains groupes culturels prolétarisés. Au «déficit» linguistique, scolaire et culturel proclamé, elles opposent au positif des expériences linguistiques et des héritages culturels différents. Leur action s'inscrit dans une volonté de promotion des individus et des groupes minoritaires plutôt que dans une offensive unitaire, souvent nationaliste, de «lutte contre l'illettrisme». Ces associations qui travaillent sur le terrain de la culture des autres vont plutôt définir leur action comme une contre-alphabétisation ou comme une autre alphabétisation. Celle-ci consistera surtout à aménager de meilleures conditions d'expression culturelle endogène, à trouver des ouvertures de communication interculturelle, à faire valoir la différence.

Ce triptyque d'associations a beaucoup simplifié la réalité. Les associations combinent, à des degrés divers, ces conceptions et ces pratiques qui sont aussi objectivement fondées sur les types de publics avec qui elles travaillent. Mais le schéma aide à situer les positions, qui sont variées quant

aux buts, aux limites de l'alphabétisation et aux stratégies, ainsi qu'aux évaluations qui sont faites.

Dans le groupe réuni, la position selon laquelle l'alphabétisation est d'abord et avant tout un service d'éducation particulier, s'adressant à des adultes qui ne savent pas lire ni écrire, ou pas assez, est représentée par une minorité d'organisations. L'alphabétisation peut être envisagée comme une fin en soi du point de vue théorique ou légal du droit de tous à une éducation minimale. Sa réduction à une action «technique» est toutefois généralement le fait des services publics d'éducation permanente, dont c'est la vocation d'assurer cette fonction spécialisée de façon universelle, ou encore le fait des réseaux associatifs sous tutelle des organismes publiques qui encadrent des programmes nationaux de formation de base.

Pour certains, l'alphabétisation en soi appartient à une époque révolue. Elle n'a pas donné les résultats escomptés. Elle se fondait sur une vision magique de ses potentialités et sur une illusion quant à sa nécessité. L'expérience a montré qu'elle n'est pas un service essentiel, sauf du point de vue des alphabétiseurs. La conception offensive de la «lutte contre l'illettrisme» ne pouvait avoir pour effet que de consolider le nouveau clan professionnel des alphabétiseurs, tout en écartant davantage le public convoité. D'ailleurs, devant les résultats douteux de ces mobilisations «primitives» (on parle de «préhistoire de l'alphabétisation»), l'offre d'éducation de base s'est élargie en matière de cours et de stages, elle s'est étendue à des publics de niveaux et profils divers et aux projets multiples. Elle a aussi perdu son appellation première d'«alphabétisation» est a adopté un registre assez étendu d'étiquettes (qui pourraient faire l'objet d'un recensement).

Pour d'autres, le travail ponctuel sur l'écriture et la lecture n'est pas du tout périmé, mais il ne peut être mené seul. Il doit s'inscrire dans les habitudes de vie et le calendrier social des communautés locales. Si l'alphabétisation en soi n'est pas un besoin prioritaire, tous les autres y sont liés néanmoins. La régénération de l'espace social comme celle de l'identité des individus qui l'habitent (mal) passent par ce «processus transversal d'éducation de base», comme on dit au WABET. Dans un projet de développement global, la formation linguistique s'intègre dans un «processus de formation sociale au sens le plus large».

Le «décloisonnement» de l'alphabétisation des adultes doit principalement avoir lieu entre générations. Dans une approche communautaire, la priorité va à l'alphabétisation et à la scolarisation des jeunes. Travail d'alphabétisation auprès des mères, aide aux enfants après l'école, école du samedi, travail auprès des institutrices, alphabétisation des jeunes «pour guérir des blessures de l'école», actions communautaires intégrant les enfants, liens et actions communes avec des organisations de jeunes sont autant d'exemples cités de manières de lier l'alphabétisation des adultes à celle des jeunes générations ainsi qu'à celle des éducateurs du milieu

scolaire. De tels liens, contraires aux champs de compétence professionnels et institutionnels, risquent d'engendrer des conflits et des fermetures sur soi, comme on en a vu un exemple au Portugal.

Pour beaucoup, l'alphabétisation comprise dans une action culturelle, sociale ou communautaire plus globale est passée de la salle de cours à la rue, au quartier, aux autres associations, aux lieux de production réelle: elle s'est émancipée de l'espace éducatif spécialisé pour s'exercer «dans la vraie vie». Là où elle et encore symbolisée par un lieu précis, celui-ci s'appelle atelier, maison, foyer, local, etc. Il n'existe plus en tant que tel, il est explicitement lié à son contexte social. Il est ouvert, fonctionne en réseau, agit en interaction avec d'autres partenaires associatifs, délègue beaucoup de son travail à d'autres organisations locales. L'image est celle d'un centre éclaté dont les activités éparpillées de «communication» et d'«expression globale» ne peuvent en fait se développer que dans ces interactions et ces échanges multiples.

L'éclatement des limites touche encore la distinction entre tuteur ou formateur et apprenant ou participant. On peut chercher à les rapprocher par l'origine sociale: ils doivent venir du même milieu, parler le même langage. On peut chercher à rétrécir la distance qui les sépare sur le plan de la formation: les formateurs seront recrutés sur le critère de leur engagement social et de leur expérience communautaire et non sur celui de la «compétence reconnue». On veut également «autonomiser» le rôle de l'apprenant en lui reconnaissant le pouvoir d'autogestion de ses projets ou le rôle d'autoformateur, l'«autre» ne se justifiant plus qu'en tant que «facilitateur» du transfert. Là où les distinctions statutaires sont carrément refusées, les personnages en jeu dans les différents projets collectifs seront représentés comme des acteurs aux rôles multiples, ayant les mêmes droits démocratiques et les mêmes revendications à mener. On est ainsi passé de l'«apprenant» univalent au «participant» à plusieurs chapeaux, la distinction demeurant surtout entre permanent ou salarié et bénévole ou participant à «statut précaire».

La réduction au même ou au semblable, remplaçant la relation duale classique, est critiquée à plusieurs titres. Elle peut cacher une manipulation de type populiste; elle crée un mythe égalitariste qui empêche que se développent les services attendus; elle prive les professionnels d'une identité, d'un langage propre et de techniques efficaces. Ces problèmes concernent particulièrement l'alphabétisation au sens littéral (l'apprentissage de l'écrit), qu'il faut distinguer du travail de socialisation, ainsi que le lieu d'accueil des activités, que d'aucuns ne veulent pas voir considérer comme un «drop-in». Finalement, la tendance à l'éclatement de l'alphabétisation n'est pas suivie jusqu'au bout de sa logique.

On rappelle qu'il reste beaucoup de personnes analphabètes, ce qui justifie le travail «technique», et que le rôle de l'alphabétiseur est central

dans une équipe intégrée. Pour Omer Arrijs par exemple, même si «la solution n'est pas chez nous, [qu'] elle est dans la société», on n'a pas renoncé aux cours au centre d'alphabétisation, on les développe au contraire.

Ce qui fait globalement consensus par delà les différences de contextes et de tendances évoquées, c'est l'intégration de l'alphabétisation dans un processus social d'éducation populaire. L'alphabétisation s'inscrit avant tout dans un espace social réel, «dans la vie». Elle s'insinue dans le langage, dans les valeurs, dans les échanges d'une communauté locale pour expliciter ou créer du sens, de la valeur, pour développer la force d'expression et de revendication, pour trouver de nouveaux partenaires et tenter d'ouvrir l'espace clos de la réclusion. On ne croit plus guère à la «libération des opprimés» ni même à leur prochaine réhabilitation dans le cercle des dignités et des droits de l'homme. On a fait l'expérience que l'action d'alphabétisation conduit, plutôt qu'à des changements radicaux, à l'aménagement des espaces de l'exclusion, qui s'étendent. On sait que les résultats sont mitigés et reportés au long terme. Et pourtant, l'action implique l'engagement des participants au-delà de l'intérêt individuel immédiat comme de la prestation technique professionnelle. Le travail dans la langue, dans le sens et dans la communication ouvre sur de nouveaux échanges, sur des dialogues jusqu'alors fermés.

Le but de ce travail commun à la plupart des acteurs de cette recherche engagée[5] n'est pas l'intégration, ni l'insertion, ni aucune autre récompense sociale promise à la fin de l'action. Il est plutôt dans le changement du «destin» des choses ou dans l'ouverture de voies autres que la soumission à l'irrémédiable. Tous croient que la parole recèle cette force subtile, qu'ils cherchent à développer dans ce qu'ils nomment encore l'alphabétisation.

CONCLUSION

Les conclusions du séminaire ont été présentées. J'ai tenté, dans ce texte de synthèse, de typifier les discours en prenant garde de ne pas gommer les différences et en cherchant à situer les positions dans les contextes locaux et nationaux. Pour finir, j'essaierai de schématiser encore plus les tendances fortes du discours des associations qui étaient réunies, qu'on ne doit pas confondre avec des stratégies. Ces tendances signalent des mouvements de sens, diachroniques et synchroniques, des mouvances en constellations variables, qu'il faut distinguer des changements de position sciemment organisés par une logique stratégique unique.

Le titre initial du séminaire n'a pas été changé: *Stratégies d'alphabétisation dans le mouvement associatif* («Literacy Strategies in Community-Based Organizations»). Il devrait l'être. Le mouvement associatif n'est pas uni, il n'a pas de stratégie. Les associations ne cherchent

pas à gagner la bataille de la lutte contre l'illettrisme. Elles ne font pas front commun face à un ennemi mythique ni devant un danger appréhendé. Elles forment de petites unités dont la principale qualité est sans doute l'adaptabilité aux conditions locales, là où c'est le plus dur. Ce qu'elles recherchent surtout: activer la solidarité qui gagne par la prise de parole, le dialogue, l'échange, la construction d'une voix propre, plus forte.

Ainsi donc, une des caractéristiques premières de ces associations disparates est de travailler autrement, de façon autonome et ailleurs que sur les territoires limités des organisations fortes. La distanciation la plus courante est marquée vis-à-vis de l'école: «Il ne suffit pas de perfectionner le modèle scolaire et de l'associer à l'extra-scolaire: il faut les transformer tout ensemble selon des stratégies et des pratiques sociales» (Madalena Dias).

La deuxième tendance consiste à aller des «dispositifs» professionnels spécialisés vers les pratiques sociales ordinaires, dans la vie quotidienne. Le lieu de l'action tend à se confondre avec la «vie réelle», dans ses rites familiers, au creux du calendrier communautaire.

Le déplacement implique un changement des règles du jeu. Les acteurs sont polyvalents et mélangés, si possible issus du «milieu», du «monde ordinaire» comme on dit au Québec. Le principe d'autonomie implique qu'on se dote de moyens et d'une discipline d'autogestion.

Une association locale s'imbrique dans un tissu de solidarité dont l'espace commun est précisément le local, mais précaire, marginal, refoulé hors des limites de l'espace social inclusif. Elle gagne à s'inscrire dans une plus grande organisation intégrée, une fédération, un réseau. Mais l'action locale suppose aussi que l'on pactise avec les pouvoirs publics et certaines organisations plus puissantes: on appelle ces associations tactiques le «partenariat». Il est vivement recherché ces temps-ci.

On n'évite pas le pouvoir politique, mais on ne l'affronte plus comme jadis à travers des slogans, en rangs serrés ou dans un parti. On l'invite sur place, au local, pour conclure un pacte ou signer une charte (de non-agression, de solidarité, de respect des droits de l'homme, de droit à la dignité, etc.). Le politique s'est déplacé. Dans les zones de l'exclusion, on cherche les moyens de la survie, de la légitimité, de la solution à l'inclusion illusoire, parfois volontairement refusée. C'est valable pour l'économie comme pour la culture: on y cherche d'autres valeurs, de l'espace du refoulé à celui du tolérable, voire de l'acceptable malgré tout.

Une nouvelle idéologie? L'histoire récente a banalisé l'idée de crise, elle en a élargi les effets, énormément agrandi les populations touchées, et elle a lié les faits planétaires il n'y a pas si longtemps continentaux, sinon nationaux. Le prolétariat n'accédera plus au pouvoir, merci camarade!

Les valeurs positives qui animent l'action, aujourd'hui, dans ces associations: solidarité pour le respect des droits de l'homme, organisation nouvelle pour le développement autocentré, formation de réseaux d'échanges au quotidien, liaison du local au global par le téléphone arabe... à défaut de moyens électroniques.

Et l'alphabétisation? Il reste bien des traces des «dispositifs» passés, des campagnes d'éradication et des utopies du développement. Beaucoup d'associations travaillent aussi pour des institutions fortes qui ont planifié la formation permanente comme substitut au travail et à la délinquance. D'autres ont opéré beaucoup de décloisonnements et expérimenté des tactiques multiples de communication, de prise de parole, d'échange de savoirs...

L'idéologie pédagogique de l'alphabétisation n'est plus un terrain fréquenté par beaucoup d'associations, sinon par dépit. Les «cahiers des charges» assurent bien la «pérennité» des associations, mais ils sont trop lourds. Dans la langue, dans les langues, comme ailleurs, on organise la résistance à l'exclusion, puisqu'on y est installé pour longtemps: des partenariats interculturels, des «co-investigations», des expositions de rue, des occupations théâtrales, des émissions de radio, des concerts, des concours d'écriture... même avec ceux qui n'auraient jamais écrit. Le séminaire de Namur s'est terminé sur cette recherche de moyens, de conditions, de lieux de diffusion de ces messages ou choses à dire plus librement et autrement.

Si l'alphabétisation, le mot (ou ses équivalents régionaux comme l'éducation de base, l'écriturisation, la lecturisation, etc.), n'est pas remplacé, ses techniques ont été replacées et transformées en d'autres lieux et d'autres circonstances, dans d'autres actions qu'on aime dire ouvertes par opposition à l'espace désormais clôturé des pédagogies et des programmes de formation de base. On en expérimente de nouvelles, moins techniques, plus tactiques, qui peuvent mettre en jeu tous les sens quand le «doigté» de l'écriture est plus ou moins expérimenté. On joue aussi à inverser l'action d'alphabétisation en la dirigeant vers les «inclus», particulièrement les «incluseurs», formateurs et autres préposés au «placement».

«Peut-on encore parler d'alphabétisation?», demande Francesco Azzimonti[6]. L'autre pédagogie auprès des exclus «riches de savoirs, d'expériences, d'histoire [...] ne sera sans doute plus l'alphabétisation», conclut aussi, sur le ton de l'interrogation, Omer Arrijs. «Et si l'alphabétisation, c'était le contraire d'une école en vase clos», conclut au conditionnel Sylvie Roy en faisant allusion à une organisation communautaire utopique, comme si elle n'était pas un peu partout déjà en expérimentation. Quant à José Luis Corzo, il termine en évoquant la fête, pour ainsi mieux inverser l'ambiance morale austère qui caractérise l'*éthos* pédagogique de bas d'échelle. La recherche en cours dans le domaine de la culture et de la langue ordinaire est elle aussi imprégnée de cet *éthos* de plaisir qui anime toutes les expériences actuelles d'alphabétisation.

NOTES

1. Ute Jaehn était absente. Elise de Coster était remplacée par Maryse Perreault.

2. Le rapport du séminaire de Namur, intitulé *Stratégies d'alphabétisation dans le mouvement associatif*, est distribué gratuitement par l'Institut de l'Unesco pour l'Éducation. (En français, accompagné d'un résumé en anglais.)

3. Jean-Paul Hautecœur, « Offre généreuse, demande bloquée : le paradoxe actuel de l'alphabétisation », *ALPHA 90*, sous la direction de J.-P. Hautecœur, Québec / Hambourg, ministère de l'Éducation du Québec / Institut de l'Unesco pour l'Éducation, 1990.

4. « S'alphabétiser, c'est se donner les moyens de connaître (« lire pour comprendre le monde », pour reprendre les paroles de Freire), élever la voix quand on s'est toujours tu (écrire ce que l'on est) et communiquer aux autres ce que l'on a appris (atteindre un public) » (M. Hamilton, R. Ivanic, D. Barton).

5. Jean-Paul Hautecœur, *La recherche-action en alphabétisation*, Ottawa, Secrétariat national à l'alphabétisation, 1991. (Édition bilingue français / anglais.)

6. Francesco Azzimonti, « L'alphabétisation éclatée », *Hommes et migrations*, n° 1119, févr. 1989, p. 27-32.

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ANNEXE

CHARTE POUR UN PROJET ASSOCIATIF

Des choix pour l'associatif, pour la société, pour les personnes.

Nous lançons un défi à nous-mêmes, au monde politique, à la société: gagner la reconnaissance de l'associatif en tant qu'acteur social essentiel de la démocratie.

Coordination interrégionale
des associations et de leurs travailleurs
(CIRAT)

CARTE D'IDENTITÉ

La genèse de la CIRAT* (Coordination interrégionale des associations et de leurs travailleurs) se situe dans les actions menées en Wallonie en 1989-1990 en réaction à ce qu'était à l'époque le projet PRIME coulé depuis en décret régional.

Dans l'effervescence du «réveil du non-marchand» (enseignement, soins de santé, etc.), le travail assumé par l'associatif faisait figure du «parent le plus pauvre...»

Plus que fragilisée par les années néo-libérales et l'ambiance du tout à la rentabilité financière, du tout à l'économique, notre action s'était peu à peu transformée dans la perception des politiques, des leaders d'opinion et du public non averti en un magma imprécis, incontrôlable et déstructuré.

De là à considérer qu'il s'agissait d'un secteur essentiellement composé de planqués structurellement inefficaces, voire idéalistes, donc peu compétents dans le meilleur des cas, il n'y avait qu'un pas qui fut allégrement franchi par nombre de responsables politiques.

Bien entendu il était temps de réagir et de démontrer que notre rôle est important, fondamental et indispensable à une société démocratique. Il faut savoir ce que l'on veut: le phénomène des banlieues en France et au Royaume-Uni, des centres-villes chez nous, les migrations, les exclusions, l'analphabétisme, le retour des soupes populaires, etc., autant de symptômes que le secteur associatif tente de gérer avec des moyens dérisoires, malgré une reconnaissance de l'action qui lui est quasi systématiquement refusée.

Au-delà des protestations spectaculaires, il était nécessaire de se pencher sur les réalités de l'associatif, sur son identité, ses emplois, son financement, etc.

Cinq jours de formation-action ont été organisés en mai et juin derniers au cours desquels nous avons réfléchi sur les enjeux de l'associatif avec des experts, des hommes politiques, des syndicalistes et des administratifs: Max DELESPESSE, Pierre GEORIS, Eugène MOMMEN, Georges REMION, Réginald SAVAGE, Philippe TYNANT, Pasquale COLLICHIO, Thierry JACQUES, Martine SIMONIS, Luc CARTON, Pierre REMAN, Jacques YERNA, Xavier MABILLE, Yves DE WASSEIGE, Étienne GROSJEAN, Albert CARTON, Jacques ZWICK, Philippe DEFEYT, Jean-Marie LEONARD.

Au terme de ces cinq journées, nous avons élaboré la CHARTE POUR UN PROJET ASSOCIATIF qui est la synthèse de nos réflexions et notre plateforme de revendications pour les mois et les années à venir

Aujourd'hui, plus d'une centaine d'associations, de fédérations et de travailleurs nous ont rejoint et cela ne cesse d'augmenter.

Les adhérents à la CIRAT viennent du namurois et du Hainaut, de la province de Liège et de la région de Bruxelles-capitale, de Nivelles et de Rochefort, etc.

Partout dans la Communauté française, le besoin de se réunir pour défendre le concept des P.M.A. (petites et moyennes associations) pour l'autonomie et l'idée d'économie sociale se fait sentir parce qu'il est urgent de proclamer que l'association est un concept fondamental de la démocratie et que poser la question de l'associatif c'est poser la question du choix de développement.

* CIRAT
rue P. Pastur, 36 / 1
7390 QUAREGNON
Belgique
Tél.: 65 / 64 1400

Bd. Brand Whitlock, 105
1200 Bruxelles
Belgique
Tel et Fax: 02 / 735 4939

I. L'ASSOCIATIF, UN PÔLE

I.i. Une qualité de vie pour tous

Le champ de notre action est diversifié, autant que la vie même des personnes et des groupes, leurs besoins, leur créativité : social, culturel, éducation permanente, formation, lutte contre l'exclusion, centres de jeunes, immigration, rencontre interculturelle, solidarité Nord-Sud, etc.

Dans la diversité de nos terrains, nous positionnons un associatif qui est déjà et qui peut devenir davantage un espace de rassemblement, d'initiatives, d'autonomie, de solidarité, qui produise du **sens** sur les plans collectif et personnel, pour les acteurs de l'associatif lui-même (ses usagers, ses travailleurs, ses promoteurs, son terrain), mais aussi la société dans son ensemble :

— en rendant accessible à tous une qualité de vie;

— en rendant plus réelle la démocratie parce qu'il ouvre des espaces d'expression;

— en participant à la production de la société, parce qu'il est un facteur de développement aussi essentiel que les agents de la croissance économique ou que les pouvoirs publics et qu'il est centré sur la dimension humaine du développement.

L'existence de l'associatif est donc un « plus » pour la société. Les petites et moyennes associations qui mènent des actions autonomes (P.M.A. pour l'autonomie) et qui pourtant n'ont guère voix au chapitre jouent un rôle irremplaçable.

I.ii. Le rapport au pôle marchand

Face au marché qui tend à noyer tout le reste de la société, nous proposons **un mode de développement** qui ne se réduise pas à la croissance du P.N.B., qui ne s'évalue pas uniquement sous forme de compétitivité, de performance, de rentabilité, de profit financier.

En Belgique, pour les années 1980 à 1990, la croissance totale du P.N.B. a été de 21,7 p. 100[1]. Cet accroissement de la richesse nationale s'est pourtant accompagné d'une **exclusion ou, du moins, d'une précarisation croissante** qui touchent plus de 20 p. 100 de la population[2].

Pour ceux-ci, la satisfaction des droits fondamentaux (revenus décents, travail, logement, santé, éducation, etc.) est devenue plus difficile, malgré l'accroissement de la richesse globale.

Dans ce contexte, beaucoup d'associations acceptent de jouer un rôle de gestion de la précarité et de la pauvreté. Vu l'urgence, la restriction des moyens de l'association et donc l'impossibilité de mener des actions plus fondamentales, elles n'ont pas d'autre choix.

Mais notre action, par son ampleur et sa qualité, nous donne le droit de remettre en cause la société et ses choix fondamentaux. C'est d'ailleurs pour mieux les valoriser que nous sommes demandeurs d'évaluation de nos activités sur des critères établis tant par les pouvoirs publics que par nous-mêmes.

Centré sur le profit, le pôle marchand se situe comme non responsable du développement qualitatif de la société et des personnes. Les répercussions sociales, les exclusions qui sont le résultat de l'extension de la sphère de la marchandise ne sont pas pris en considération par lui. Il parvient à imposer aux pouvoirs publics un rôle de garant de la compétivité et de la croissance.

Il ne suffit pas de parler de la dette publique financière, il faut aussi parler de la dette publique humaine et sociale. Nous proposons donc un mode de développement où l'économique soit subordonné à la satisfaction des droits fondamentaux de toute la population et à son épanouissement culturel, social et humain. Les choix de politique économique doivent être orientés en ce sens. Nous sommes des acteurs essentiels de ce développement. Nous représentons une **économie associative :**

— dont les apports de convivialité, solidarité, autonomie, liberté, éducation, culture, formation, etc., sont des dimensions

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essentielles de la vie des personnes et de la société;

- dont le pôle marchand tire largement profit, à moindre coût, notamment parce que l'associatif assume, bon gré mal gré, les conséquences des restructurations dans les entreprises: gestion sociale du chômage et de l'exclusion;

- dont l'utilité socio-économique, indirecte ou directe, est importante même si elle est le plus souvent minimisée ou négligée, voire dénigrée.

Nous relevons les effets économiques, par exemple des actions de formation ou d'insertion menées par les associations, ou le fait que l'activité elle-même des associations comporte une dimension économique (circulation monétaire, offre de services, consommation, etc.) dont la somme n'est pas négligeable dans la production de richesses nationales.

I.iii. Par rapport aux pouvoirs publics

Face au **clientélisme** et à la **pilarisation** (autour des familles idéologiques) qui marquent la vie politique et la vie associative, nous développons et pouvons développer davantage **des espaces d'expression autonomes** où puissent se dire, se diffuser, être répercutées:

- les paroles formulées sur nos terrains et dont les décideurs n'ont le plus souvent quasiment aucune idée (l'exclusion sociale est aussi une exclusion de la parole publique);

- les préoccupations et les propositions des travailleurs des associations qui sont eux-mêmes une composante de la sphère de précarité, notamment à cause des plans de résorption du chômage (PRC) qui sont maintenant considérés comme des emplois «normaux» des associations.

I.iv. Conséquences

Nous proposons une opération de renouveau de la démocratie par un retour de l'ensemble des citoyens dans la vie publique.

- Nous **regroupons** dans les régions et sous-régions des associations et des travailleurs situés de façons diverses (richesse des modes d'association) pour augmenter la force du pôle associatif, le sortir de sa précarité actuelle et négocier sa place par rapport aux pouvoirs publics et à la sphère marchande.

- Nous agissons pour créer un **label de qualité associative**, que ce soit dans les services offerts aux personnes ou aux groupes, dans l'action sociale ou culturelle, dans l'éducation permanente, dans la formation, dans l'action pour le changement social, dans l'analyse, la critique, la recherche d'«alternative», etc. L'évaluation en est un instrument indispensable.

- Nous proposons la création, à court terme, d'un **lieu de négociation** rassemblant les associations (y compris les P.M.A. pour l'autonomie) et les pouvoirs publics pour définir une politique et les moyens de développement du pôle associatif: un conseil pour l'associatif.

- Nous relevons l'enjeu particulier des «P.M.A. pour l'autonomie» qui, bien qu'elles soient articulées à l'ensemble associatif, n'en constituent pas moins une spécificité. Beaucoup d'entre elles dépendent des piliers constitués par les familles politiques. D'autres en sont indépendantes. Mais la plupart comportent une dimension de recherche d'autonomie dans leur action.

- Nous choisissons de mettre en évidence l'associatif comme un **enjeu prioritaire** pour toute la société et pour toutes les personnes qui forment les publics, les travailleurs, les promoteurs des associations.

- Des **alliances fortes et larges** seront nécessaires pour aboutir à une remise en cause de la domination de la sphère marchande et à un développement qualitatif global et général dont la qualité associative est une dimension centrale. Elles concernent l'ensemble du pôle dit «non marchand» ou «tiers secteur» ou «économie sociale»: associations, syndicats, enseignement, soins de santé, médias, culture, aide et action sociale, etc.

II. LES ACTEURS

Nous engageons une démarche de clarification entre les différents acteurs de l'associatif. Les associations ne sont pas des entreprises du même type que celles du pôle marchand. Beaucoup d'entre elles sont des lieux où l'on cherche des formes de gestion qui associent les travailleurs ou les usagers au projet de l'association. Elles veulent affirmer cette spécificité. Celle-ci sera d'autant plus crédible qu'elle s'accompagnera d'une plus grande clarté sur les rôles particuliers des promoteurs, des travailleurs, des bénévoles, des professionnels, des usagers. Cette clarification n'est pas de soi contradictoire avec une gestion participative.

II.i. Les usagers de l'associatif et notamment les exclus du système social

Les associations répondent à des besoins, offrent des services, organisent des activités de formation, d'éducation permanente, d'accompagnement social, d'expression culturelle, de revendication, etc.

Nous pensons que le «label de qualité associative» suppose une démarche où les usagers passent d'une attitude de simples consommateurs de services à une intervention en tant qu'acteurs dans leurs associations.

II.ii. Les travailleurs

Rupture avec la précarité — Un emploi de qualité

Nos objectifs sont :

1) que l'associatif ne soit plus considéré comme un lieu de traitement social passif du chômage et de l'exclusion et que les plans de résorption du chômage ne soient plus l'emploi type de l'associatif.

2) que soit mis sur pied un **plan actif particulier de l'emploi associatif** et qu'il soit financé de façon indépendante des P.R.C.

L'actuelle confusion P.R.C./emploi conduit à un parasitage réciproque. Nous appelons à renverser le consensus qui tolère la précarité comme une fatalité. La qualité de l'emploi est une composante indispensable de la qualité associative et d'un autre mode de développement.

Nous pensons que l'associatif comme tel doit participer activement au débat en cours sur le partage du travail. Le nombre de travailleurs employés dans les associations dans le cadre des P.R.C. (par exemple 10 000 T.C.T. en Wallonie en juin 1990; 5 000 à Bruxelles) est déjà une indication des besoins réels en fait d'emplois associatifs.

II.iii. Les promoteurs

Nous visons à la reconnaissance et à la clarification de la fonction propre du promoteur associatif :

— Dans les relations employeur-travailleur, le rôle de l'employeur doit être défini.

— Par ailleurs, sur le terrain, les mêmes personnes peuvent être à la fois employeurs, travailleurs et porteurs de projets associatifs. De plus, l'enjeu proprement associatif dépasse les seules relations de travail dans «l'entreprise-association» : il concerne tout citoyen qui y est sensible. Il y a donc une fonction de promoteur associatif qui est différente de celle de l'employeur ou du conseil d'administration.

II.iv. Commissions paritaires

Nos objectifs sont :

1) obtenir une représentation propre des travailleurs des P.M.A. dans les commissions paritaires existantes ou à constituer, dans le cadre des mandats syndicaux.

2) obtenir une représentation propre des promoteurs des «P.M.A. pour l'autonomie» dans ces commissions paritaires. Nous proposons notamment une négociation avec la FESEP (Fédération des

employeurs du secteur de l'éducation permanente) sur les représentations des P.M.A. pour l'autonomie.

La Commission paritaire sera un outil pour la définition d'un ordre de qualité pour les travailleurs de l'associatif et, par là même, un moyen de meilleure reconnaissance de l'associatif lui-même. Par ailleurs, elle doit se compléter d'une négociation incluant les pouvoirs subsidiants aux côtés des représentants des travailleurs et de ceux des employeurs.

II.v. Les syndicats

Nous proposons **un débat et une négociation avec les organisations syndicales** sur la représentation des travailleurs, les délégations syndicales inter-P.M.A., la prise en charge par les syndicats des particularités de l'associatif, la constitution et le fonctionnement des commissions paritaires.

Les syndicats sont eux-mêmes une forme d'association. Ils sont eux aussi promoteurs et employeurs notamment de travailleurs à statut précaire. Face à l'associatif comme face aux nouveaux mouvements sociaux, ils doivent se renouveler et inventer de nouvelles façons d'être présents, de nouveaux rôles.

II.vi. Les pouvoirs publics

Ils ont un rôle important dans le financement de l'associatif mais ils ne sont pas que cela.

Nous souhaitons que soient clarifiés les fonctions et les rôles particuliers de chacun, pouvoirs publics et associations: les critères et moyens d'un partenariat dans le cadre de tâches clairement définies.

En effet, on nous confie trop le rôle de réaliser à moindre coût ce que le service public ne peut ou ne veut réaliser lui-même. Sous la pression néo-libérale, celui-ci a trop démissionné.

Nous voulons obtenir:

— une politique positive de développement de l'associatif reconnu comme prioritaire;

— un plan pour l'emploi dans l'associatif;

— un plan de **financement efficace et cohérent** de l'associatif: ses activités, ses emplois, son fonctionnement.

III. LE FINANCEMENT DE L'ASSOCIATIF

III.i. Nous souhaitons participer à la négociation sur les critères de financement des activités associatives (voir le Conseil pour l'associatif)

III.ii. Trois axes pour un financement valable

1. Réorientation des priorités budgétaires

Des faits sont révélateurs, par exemple l'aide aux entreprises qui se monte à 150 milliards sans qu'aient été précisés des critères de retombées de ces aides sur l'emploi, l'environnement, la qualité de vie, l'accessibilité de tous aux droits fondamentaux, etc., bref sans lien avec un développement global de la société au profit de l'ensemble de la population. Les aides restent des cadeaux.

Nous proposons:

l'introduction dans les budgets de critères de **retombées qualitatives** pour la population;

la détermination de **budgets importants pour le financement de l'associatif**;

la responsabilisation du pôle marchand dans le financement de l'associatif, par exemple en élargissant les possibilités d'utilisation du fonds de 0,25 p. 100 (dont les conditions d'accès sont très limitées) ou la création d'un fonds particulier.

2. Arbitrages entre les divers pouvoirs

La Communauté française, pour soutenir efficacement l'associatif, devra

augmenter ses dépenses. Or, elle n'a que des capacités très limitées d'augmenter ses recettes. Une des possibles voies d'augmentation des capacités financières de la Communauté sera l'arbitrage avec d'autres niveaux de pouvoir, notamment les régions. Nous proposons que ces arbitrages prennent en considération de façon précise les besoins de financement propres aux associations.

3. Refinancement des pouvoirs publics

Les arbitrages ne suffiront pas. Un refinancement des pouvoirs publics est nécessaire. Or, depuis 1985, les recettes fiscales croissent moins vite que le P.N.B. Cela représente, depuis, un manque de recettes de 200 à 250 milliards. L'impôt réel des sociétés (ISOC) ne dépasse pas 20 p. 100 en moyenne[1]. Certaines parmi les plus grosses d'entre elles ne paient presque aucun impôt. La réforme fiscale a surtout profité aux couches les plus aisées de la population (les cadeaux fiscaux croissent avec les revenus)[2]. Les revenus du capital bénéficient d'un cadeau de 40 milliards par la réduction du précompte mobilier[3]. Le refinancement suppose une nouvelle réforme de la fiscalité des sociétés, des personnes et de la propriété.

III.iii. La boule de neige de la dette des associations: une composante de la dette publique

Les retards dans les paiements des subventions ont contraint beaucoup d'associations à s'endetter lourdement et à cumuler les charges d'intérêt. Pour rappel, celles-ci ne sont pas subsidiables par les pouvoirs publics. Dès lors, ces derniers doivent être responsabilisés par rapport à cette dette et en assumer la charge dans la mesure où les retards dans les subventions en sont la cause.

Nous réclamons:

- une accélération effective de la procédure de liquidation des paiements de subsides;
- la mise sur pied d'un système de prêt sans intérêt;
- le paiement automatique d'avances aux associations agréées.

III.iv. Un certain nombre d'activités associatives doivent être prises en charge à 100 p. 100 par les pouvoirs publics

- Celles qu'ils délèguent;
- Celles qui ne peuvent se financer par elles-mêmes, notamment dans le cadre de la lutte contre l'exclusion ou pour l'accès de tous à la satisfaction des droits les plus fondamentaux.

Des formules qui garantissent l'autonomie de ces activités sont possibles, même dans les cas où la subsidiation atteint 100 p. 100.

IV. L'EUROPE

Quelle place sera faite à «l'économie associative» dans «l'Europe des marchands»? Y aura-t-il une Europe associative outre les lobbies qui se mettent en position déjà?

Nous participerons au regroupement des associations de base qui se fait jour dans différents pays européens.

Nous réclamons une amélioration du fonctionnement des fonds tels que le Fonds social européen, les programmes de lutte contre la pauvreté, etc., dont l'accès est trop limité et les retards de paiement considérables.

NOTES

1. Note de conjoncture du ministère des Finances, mai 1991.

2. J. ZWICK ; *Rapport à l'exécutif de la Communauté française*, juillet 1990, p. 5-6.

L'auteur signale que l'évaluation de la pauvreté n'est pas aisée. Il se réfère notamment à des études réalisées, en 1985, sur la base des revenus, notamment celles de :

Het Centrum voor Sociaal Beleid :

6,3 p. 100 de la population est en situation de pauvreté objective, c'est-à-dire qu'elle dispose de moins de 75 p. 100 du minimum socio-vital;

21,2 p. 100 « de la population est en état de précarité objective.

L'Université de Liège :

5,3 p. 100 de la population est en état de pauvreté extrême (dispose de moins de 24 000 FB par ménage et par mois);

6,8 p. 100 de la population ne dispose pas du revenu médian des ménages (25 000 FB);

27,6 p. 100 de la population est en état de pauvreté relative, c'est-à-dire qu'elle dispose de moins de 80 p. 100 du revenu médian des ménages (40 000 FB).

Il convient d'ajouter que la pauvreté ou la précarité ne se définissent pas seulement à partir des revenus, mais aussi par rapport à la satisfaction d'autres droits fondamentaux : travail (accroissement du nombre de postes de travail atypiques), logement, santé, éducation, culture, etc.

3. Yves de WASSEIGE, lors de la formation-action de la CIRAT le 15 mai 1991.

4. Selon Jean HINDRINKS, chercheur à l'IRES et aux facultés N.D.D.P. à Namur, après la réforme MAYSTADT « les revenus inférieurs à 750 000 FB (66 p. 100 des contribuables) ont en moyenne des réductions d'impôt sur les personnes physiques de 2,9 p. 100 de leurs revenus imposables tandis que les revenus supérieurs à un million et demi (5 p. 100) ont, en moyenne, des réductions de cet impôt par rapport à leurs revenus imposables presque deux fois plus élevées. Au-delà de 14 millions, la baisse du taux global d'imposition est supérieur à 19 p. 100. »
Les réductions de cet impôt entraînent des accroissements du revenu disponible de 0 p. 100 pour les plus pauvres (20 p. 100 des ménages qui en raison de leurs bas revenus ne paient pas ou pas assez d'impôt pour profiter de la réforme fiscale) à 37 p. 100 pour les plus fortunés (*cf. Tendances* du 5 juillet 1990).

5. Ph. DEFEYT, *Le Soir*, 11 juillet 1990; *Tendances*, *op. cit.*

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